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04 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Barcelona Unstoppable Europa League

08 EPL

Champs Chelsea Rest of the League Eden Hazard Stats Around the EPL

24 SERIE A

Camps Juventus Rest of the League Carlos Tevez Stats Paul Pogba Paulo Bybala End of an Era: Milan

48LALIGA

Champs Barcelona Rest of the League Lionel Messi Stats Around La liga

64 BUNDESLIGA

Champs Bayern Rest of the League Kevin De Bruyne End of an Era: Klopp Around Bundesliga

82 LIGUE 1

PSG Stats Zlatan Ibrahimovic

86 MLS

Strike Partners Around the MLS

92 TACTICS

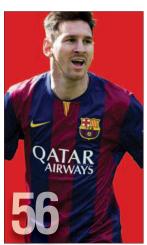
94 INSTORE

96 LASTWORD











GAME ON

he hunt for glory is the prime hunger for players of the beautiful game The nunt for giory is the prime nanger to, players of the pursuit of silverware at seasons' end drives footballers, propels them to new highs and brings out the lowest lows to those who fail to reach the coveted spot on the podium. Another long season of club soccer has come to a close, wrapped up with the return of FC Barcelona, winners of the UEFA Champions League. This time, these new champions of Europe took the continent by storm with a triumvirate of Neymar, Luis Suarez and Lionel Messi, the most ruthless trio in footballing history. Barcelona's gain is Juventus' loss, as the Italian giants claimed the Serie A title this year in Italy but could not add the biggest prize to its repertoire at years' end. Sevilla, winners of the Europa league, stand in Barcelona's way for the UEFA Super Cup. Meanwhile, in England, Jose Mourinho and Eden Hazard propelled Chelsea to another English Premier League title as the Blues dominated all year long, losing but a pair of games in the 2014/15 season. Bayern Munich won its 25th Bundesliga title, too, another historic milestone for the German outfit. Yet, there is still more history to be made this summer, as Canada's women's national team hosts the planet for the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, while Barcelona's trio head over to Chile for the Copa America! As you pursue these pages, remember that history has been made this month: new champions crowned, dynasties forged, and another chapter written in the legend of FC Barcelona and Lionel Messi. This is the champions issue of Soccer360 Magazine!

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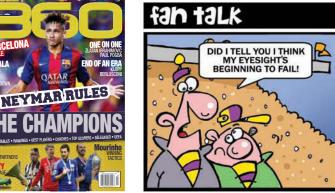
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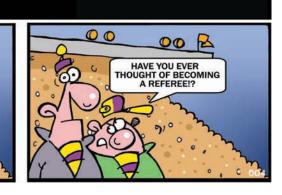
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Barcelona win the 2015 Champions League for the fifth time in club history.

Right

Neymar had a big role in this year's Barcelona success, scoring 10 goals in the champions

"DO YOU WANT CRISTIANO [RONALDO] TO WIN THE **BALLON D'OR AGAIN? STOP FOOLING** AROUND. LEO!"

BARCELONA RECORD: 11-1-1 • GOALS SCORED: 31 • FINISH: CHAMPIONS

arcelona's second treble in six years is best 2015 and the few days that followed. Because, as their season got back underway following the Christmas break, a single piece of silverware, nevermind three of them, seemed well outside the realm of possibility.

It was that afternoon in Basque country that an already sputtering campaign threatened to stall out completely

With forwards Lionel Messi and Nevmar pinned to the bench the Catalan giants failed to seriously test Real Sociedad goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli, testing him just four times over the 90 minutes. And midfielders Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta, so vital to the success of previous Blaugrana instalments, simply could not break down the Txuriurdin wall in front of them. That is, when they weren't on the back-foot. The next morning Messi was mysteriously absent from training—an illness, the club claimed—but a reported falling-out with manager Luis Enrique that had supposedly been building for months invited the latter's critics to put two and two together, and with Atletico Madrid next on the schedule there was reason to doubt whether the former Roma and Celta Vigo boss would still be around to face the champions.

Enrique, who was always going to struggle to emerge from the long shadow of Pep Guardiola, manager of Barcelona's treble-winning side of 2009, had gone into the winter rest period with



his tenure, however brief, already in doubt. A 3-1 loss to archrivals Real Madrid in October's Clasico had been followed by a 1-0 defeat at home to former club Celta, and with a 0-0 draw at Malaga and 3-2 shortfall at Paris Saint-Germain added to the record his team had taken just four wins from eight matches during an important stretch of the schedule.

"I haven't read the criticism for some time now," he remarked in mid-December. "My doctor told me not to.'

He added: "We're going to be constantly making changes and evolving. I'm not disappointed with what we've done so far."

Barcelona were four points back of leaders Real Madrid at the time. Needless to say his comments did not go down well in the Catalan

But four days after the 1-0 loss at Sociedad, Barcelona thumped Elche 5-0 in the Copa del Rey. Messi, back in the fold, scored once, as did attacking teammate Luis Suarez. Neymar found the back of the net on either side of the break and Jordi Alba rounded out the scoring. Three days after that they beat Atletico 3-1 at Camp Nou, and with their tails up they hardly looked back until the spring.

Something had happened to cause an immediate turnaround in form and mood, and several months later, by which time the treble was a distinct, if previously improbable, reality, they revealed what it was.



CHAMPIONS LEAGUE NUMBERS

TOP GOALSCORERS

PLAYER		G
Neymar	Barcelona	10
Ronaldo	Real Madrid	10
Messi	Barcelona	10
Adriano	Shakhtar	9
Martinez	Porto	7
Muller	Bayern	7
Suarez	Barcelona	7
Tevez	Juventus	7
Aguero	Man. City	6
Benzema	Real Madrid	6

MOST ASSISTS

PLAYER		A
Messi	Barcelona	6
Ronaldo	Real Madrid	4
Fabregas	Chelsea	4
Koke	Atletico	4
Muller	Bayern	3
Suarez	Barcelona	3
Tevez	Juventus	3
Lewandowski	Bayern	3
Brahimi	Porto	3
Hazard	Chelsea	3

TEAM WINS

PLAYER	GP	w	D	L
Barcelona	13	11	0	2
Bayern	12	8	1	3
Real Madrid	12	8	2	2
Juventus	13	7	3	3
Porto	10	6	3	1
Atlético	10	5	2	3
Arsenal	8	5	1	2
PSG	10	4	3	3
Monaco	10	4	3	3
Chelsea	8	4	4	0

Following the Angeta disaster Xavi had administered a brutal dressing-down—and to Messi, of all people.

"We can't allow ourselves to repeat what happened last season, and you know it," the World Cup-winner lectured, referencing the trophy-barren season of 2013-14. "Do you want Cristiano [Ronaldo] to win the Ballon d'Or again? Stop f***ing around, Leo!"

Message delivered; message heard. Between January and June the Argentina captain played some of the best football of his life, combining with Neymar and Suarez to form the most deadly attacking trio in club history. That he did it working primarily from the righthand side of the pitch spoke to the success of the adjustments enacted by Enrique, and by the time Barcelona lined up to face Juventus for the June 6 Champions League Final their destiny seemed fated: they would add the European Cup to La Liga and the Copa del Rey; Messi, Neymar and Suarez would break through the Bianconeri defense; Xavi, in his final match for the club, would lift the trophy; Enrique would take the much-deserved plaudits.

And that's exactly how it came off. Although Juventus, to their credit, battled back to equalize through Alvaro Morata after Ivan Rakitic had spotted Barcelona a fourth-minute lead, the occasion had the feel of a Catalan celebration—a final, 90-minute march to history that saw both Suarez and Neymar find the back of the net in the second half before the corks burst off the champagne bottles.

"There are no words. This is spectacular," remarked Xavi after the 3-1 victory in Berlin. "I could not ask for more—to leave like this, with the Champions League, the treble...I am very happy with how my career has gone, and to finish with this game is incredible."

Enrique, as manager tend to do, recognized the magnitude of the achievement, saying in his post-match press conference that his side had "written history again for Barcelona" and that a record including just six defeats and four draws from 60 matches represented "one of Barcelona's best campaigns.'

That it was, although it didn't always seem like it would be. The troubles of January could have derailed them. Instead, the adversity made them unstoppable.





WHAT NOW FOR

Was the 2015 Champions League Final the last hurrah for Carlos Tevez at Juventus? Despite enjoying a pair of stellar seasons at the Serie A giants, with which he scored 50 goals in 95 matches, the 31-year-old could be headed back to Argentina and Boca Juniors, which is where he made his professional debut in 2001. "I've already said it many times," he remarked in January, citing his well-known wish to finish his career in his homeland. "I said from the start, also to the club, that this would be my last contract before returning to Boca."

That return could be imminent. In mid-June Boca vice-president Oscar Moscariello travelled to Chile, where Tevez and Argentina were participating in the Copa America, in an attempt to conclude the reacquisition of the striker.

Tevez is the idol of our supporters, a symbol of Boca, but also of Argentina," he said. "We'd be delighted to have him back with us."



REMARKABLE SEASON

Neymar's big-game scoring record is remarkable. His 10 Champions League goals in 2014-15 left him level with both Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo atop the competition's scoring chart, although he accomplished the feat in fewer minutes than the pair of Ballon d'Or winners. He also scored in both legs of Barcelona's quarter-final tie with Paris Saint-Germain (including a brace in the return leg at Camp Nou, a 2-0 win), found the back of the net in the two semi-final encounters with Bayern Munich and then rounded everything off with a late strike in the Champions League Final against Juventus. In so doing he became just the second player to score in both the Champions League and Copa Libertadores finals, after Hernan Crespo. Incredibly, the 23-year-old entered the Copa America with 43 goals for Brazil—just five fewer than Zico for fourth-spot on the country's all-





2015 CHAMPIONS





Sevilla capped off another great tournament with their second consecutive Europa League Championship

Left

Carols Tevez redeemed his career at Juve. Fans of the club will be hoping he stays on for at least another year.

SEVILLA RECORD: 11-3-1 • GOALS SCORED: 29 **FINISH: CHAMPIONS**

Twice champions of the UEFA Europa League, Spanish outfit Sevilla FC is flying high! Los Rojiblancos secured a second consecutive Europa League title to cap off the 2014/15 season, defeating Ukraining side Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk 3-2 in the final at Stadion Narodowy, a 45,000-seat stadium in Warsaw. Poland. Sevilla's road to the final was paved in big wins, in particular, a 5-0 crushing of Fiorentina in the semi-finals and a 5-2 win over Villarreal in the Round of 16; but, the tournament final proved a tougher test for the reigning champions. Sevilla, who last year defeated Portuguese outfit SL Benfica for this title, retain the Europa League crown and will square off in the UEFA Super Cup against their fellow Spaniards, FC Barcelona, who defeated Juventus in the UEFA Champions League final. And, while Sevilla has Champions League ambitions of their own, a fifth-place finish in La Liga keeps them in the Europa League once again.

But for Sevilla's supporters, two Europa League titles is a huge boost in confidence not only for their own team, but for the ambitions of the club as well. Built with a strong core group, Sevilla is a team on the rise: perhaps, soon enough, these Europa League wins will play second-fiddle to an even grander prize!

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE NUMBERS

TOP GOALSCORERS

PLAYER		G
Lukaku	Everton	8
Alan	Salzburg	8
Bacca	Sevilla	7
Higuain	Napoli	7
Refaelov	Brugge	6

MOST ASSISTS

PLAYER		A
Vietto	Villarreal	6
Yarmolenko	Dynamo Kyiv	6
De Bruyne	Wolfsburg	5
Richards	Feyenoord	5
Refaelov	Brugge	4

TEAM WINS

DI AVED	6 D	347	_	
PLAYER	GP	W	D	L
Sevilla	15	11	3	1
Napoli	14	8	4	2
Fiorentina	14	7	4	3
Dynamo Kyiv	12	7	1	4
Brugge	12	7	4	1



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runaway Premier League champions, as Jose Mourinho delivered on the promise of the previous campaign. Oli Coates reflects on the Blues' success.

Chelsea celebrate winning the Premier League trophy for the first time in five years

Right Jose Mourinho masterminded a familiar success in his second season back at Chelsea having been away from the club for almost six years

 ${f N}$ o other team led the Premier League by anything other than goal difference once Chelsea played their opening fixture of the campaign. Jose Mourinho demonstrated his brilliance to ensure the League title returned to Stamford Bridge for the first time in five years. The writing was almost on the wall from that very first round of games. Rarely is a manager able to pull off such concise and telling signings in the transfer market, but on the back of the £50m sale of David Luiz, Mourinho was able to address the key areas of his squad with pinpoint precision.

Chelsea had been crying out for a lethal striker and Diego Costa immediately adapted to the Premier League, scoring on his debut and quickly allaying any fears he may struggle to replicate his Atletico Madrid form. Fellow new signing Cesc Fabregas fitted seamlessly into the midfield, alongside Nemanja Matic, who Mourinho had brought back to West London the previous January.

Meanwhile, Thibaut Courtois finally dislodged Petr Cech in goal, and after his own performances in Madrid instantly looked the part. The newcomers, in addition to the buoyancy of re-signing club legend Didier Drogba, saw Chelsea fly out of the blocks, winning 10 of their first 12 games, only dropping points in drawing away at both Manchester clubs. The football was fast, exciting and entertaining, with Eden Hazard coming to the fore alongside the new boys that were stealing the headlines.

All teams invariably suffer a blip in form at some point in the season, but it is the manner of response and limitation of damage that is the making of champions. Chelsea had only won four in eight after Tottenham hit them for a 5-3 defeat on New Year's Day, a result that allowed Manchester City to draw level on points. However, Mourinho's side responded with backto-back victories, including a 5-0 thumping of Swansea at the Liberty Stadium, while City only





CHELSEA NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Diego Costa 20 Eden Hazard 14 Oscar John Terry Branislav Ivanović

TOP ASSISTS

Cesc Fàbregas 18 Eden Hazard 8 Branislav Ivanovic 5 Ramires

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

32

THIS YEAR

Record: 26-9-3 Home: 15-4-0 Away: 11-5-3 1st Finish:

LAST YEAR

Record: 25-7-6 Home: 15-3-1 10-4-5 Awav: Finish: 3rd



picked up a single point from the two games leading into a clash between the League's top two. Although a stalemate was the first of three 1-1 draws in four games at Stamford Bridge for the Blues, they maintained their consistency on the road just as City continued to drop points. A major turning point of the season came on March 1, with Chelsea not in league action thanks to a League Cup Wembley final against Spurs. The previous Saturday had seen City take Newcastle apart 5-0, while Chelsea slipped up at home conceding late against Burnley, allowing their Manchester rivals to close within five points, and almost wipe out the advantage in goal difference.

City travelled to Anfield with a chance to turn the heat up, but a delicious goal from Philippe Coutinho towards the end of the game handed Liverpool the win, before later in the afternoon Chelsea secured the League Cup trophy. It was a blow the lighter shade of blues never recovered from, going on to lose four in six, while Chelsea ground out some narrow wins to streak ahead. despite a disappointing exit from the Champions League.

This was the period where Jose Mourinho was criticised for his team's performances and style of play. Injury to the talismanic Diego Costa caused something of a blunting to the attack. Yet Loic Remy proved his worth to the squad with a couple of important strikes, and Chelsea showed a resilience and ability to emerge victorious in testing situations.

Scarcely in the Premier League does a team produce scintillating performances week in, week out. Champions come the end of the season needing to prove they can dig results out when the going is tough, when the side is underperforming, and when they look to their most gifted players for a moment of inspiration and class.

It was a hallmark of Sir Alex Ferguson's success at Old Trafford that it was paramount his teams beat lesser sides to amass as many points as possible to take pressure away from the big games. It was described as the 'Manchester United machine', grinding out wins at all costs while their rivals slipped up, although Ferguson could certainly call on some special players to attack teams of any standing.

It is Mourinho that now finds himself in that enviable position, with PFA and Football Writers' Player of the Year Hazard backed up by the likes of Costa, Oscar and Willian. Time and again it was Hazard that stepped up to the plate, while Costa was free-scoring even when not fully fit. However, these such players could not perform without the solid base provided by what could be described as the Chelsea back seven. Courtois was excellent in stepping up to be No1, aided by the remarkable John Terry. The captain was the League's outstanding defender all season, marshalling a consistent and reliable backline. In front of this, the central midfield pairing of Nemanja Matic and Cesc Fabregas are crucial to Chelsea's success. Matic has been a solid shield of protection, sacrificing little when it comes to ball playing ability, and Fabregas a runaway supplier of assists, with almost double his nearest rivals.

It was this solidity and consistency that stood the Blues in such good stead when the going did get tough, and being difficult to beat with such talented players in the final third will continue to see them a major threat next season. At 34 there will be questions about how long Terry can continue at such a high level, but his ever-present record through the season ought to keep the doubters quiet for now.

Branislay Ivanovic, who turned 31 in late February. is the only other defender who will be the wrong side of 30 come the new season's kick off, so there are some miles remaining in this backline yet, while the rest of the team is packed with players in their mid-20s.

In another comparison with Ferguson, Mourinho

Cesc Fabrega

now finds himself blessed with some of the best young talent coming through. It is ominous for the rest of the Premier League that the Chelsea boss is able to blood the likes of highly-rated Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Isaiah Brown and Nathan Ake, while Kurt Zouma is only 20 years of age and could prove to be the long term replacement

Mourinho warned upon his return to England that his first year would be a transitional phase, while he built a team to challenge for the future. At the start of this campaign he said: "We have the squad that we want to have. It is a squad for tomorrow, for next season and also a squad with big possibilities for the next five or 10 years. The Portuguese wants a sustained period of dominance, and it is not too difficult to envisage him getting it. Replacing Terry appears to be one of his biggest challenges in the coming years, although the club has already dealt admirably with the departure of stalwarts such as Frank Lampard and Ashley Cole.

Plans are afoot to increase the capacity of Stamford Bridge, which will help develop the club alongside a growing reputation around the globe. Winning this year's League title will only serve to aid Chelsea's evolution.

All of the elements are in place for Mourinho to build on this triumph, and combat what will no doubt be a renewed challenge from the rest of the top four next season. It would be a brave man that bets against the Special One adding a few more Premier League crowns before his number is up.

SECOND SEASON SUCCESS

Mourinho really gets things going. At Porto he had a 100 per cent home record in the League, won the Primera Liga title and delivered the Champions League. At Inter he followed up winning Serie A in his first season by securing an incredible treble the following

When in charge of Real Madrid he wrested La Liga from arguably the greatest club side football has ever seen, sending records tumbling along the way. Chelsea was the exception the first time he signed for them delivering the club's first League title in 50 years in his first season.

This time around, Mourinho has conformed to protocol, sweeping aside all before him on his way to claiming an eighth domestic title in his second season back at Stamford Bridge. The free-flowing attacking football that characterised the first half of the season was sacrificed at times in the run-in, but Mourinho invariably found a way to win.

That is not to say he has been without flaw. Certain decisions, such as allowing Kevin De Bruyne and Andre Schurrle to leave while bringing in the as yet unimpressive Juan Cuadrado have been questionable. Yet the list of achievements is already magnificent. Undoubtedly though, Mourinho wants more. There doesn't appear much else left to do for him in football except build a dynasty at a club. There is the feeling at Stamford Bridge that the Special One is home, and he has all the tools to dominate domestically while seeking to fulfill what is surely now his primary ambition, to conquer



"WE HAVE THE SOUAD THAT WE **WANT TO** HAVE. IT IS A **SOUAD FOR** TOMORROW. **FOR NEXT** SEASON AND ALSO A **SOUAD WITH BIG POSSIBIL-**ITIES FOR THE NEXT **FIVE OR TEN** YEARS.""

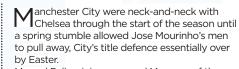
Manchester City failed TOP UF to defend the Premier League title as Arsenal again stuttered into life and Manchester United returned to the Champions League, Andrew Tuft writes...

MANCHESTER CITY - OFF-COLOUR, OFF-PACE

Yaya Toure was a shadow of his best form and rumours of an exit persisted

Pellegrini's push for first place fell well short of expectations from both Man. City fans and

"IT WAS A CASE OF BATTLING **ARSENAL AND MANCHESTER UNITED FOR** SECOND PLACE, AS **SPECULATION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF** PELLEGRINI PERSISTED"



Manuel Pellegrini was named Manager of the Month for December after City went unbeaten through Christmas and New Year but four games without a win between the middle of January and early February gave Chelsea the advantage. Further defeats to Liverpool and Burnley in March and Crystal Palace and Manchester United in April saw the title slip from City's grasp. From then on it was a case of battling Arsenal and United for second place, as speculation about the future of Pellegrini persisted. It was rumoured Pep Guardiola would be offered the chance to swap Bayern Munich for Manchester after City ended the season empty-handed. But when hired from Malaga, Pellegrini was tasked with winning five trophies in as many seasons, and the two claimed in his first year - the League Cup won before the League title - should give the Chilean a one-year grace period.

Pellegrini will then play a part in the rebuilding of an ageing City squad, one that, with precious few exceptions, seems to have lost its edge. Joe Hart remains one of the better goalkeepers around and at 28, has plenty left to offer, but the likes of Vincent Kompany and Yaya Toure had seasons to forget. In the latter's case, it's likely to be his last at the Etihad Stadium.

Sergio Aguero was again prolific but had little support as Edin Dzeko fell out of favour and Stevan Jovetic lost the faith of the boss to the point he was left out of City's Champions League squad following the January arrival of Wilfried Bony. Bony himself proved ineffective after his switch from Swansea City.

The Ivory Coast international was far from the only questionable signing made by the City hierarchy, with the £31.8m spent on Eliaquim Mangala a particular low-light. The former Porto defender may yet grow into his new surroundings but few are holding out much hope after Mangala looked distinctly ill at ease with the intensity of English football.

Europe was another painful experience for all concerned, City once again outclassed by Barcelona, as the season took a familiar trajectory to the previous one in which they were reigning champions of England. The abrasive Roberto Mancini lost his job the last time City lost the title and while Pellegrini's more conciliatory nature might save him, another season lacking silverware won't be tolerated.



TOP GOAL SCORER

Sergio Agüero	26
David Silva	12
Yaya Toure	10
Frank Lampard	6
James Milner	5

TOP ASSISTS

Jesus Navas	8
Sergio Aguero	8
David Silva	7
James Milner	7
Samir Nasri	6

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

83

38

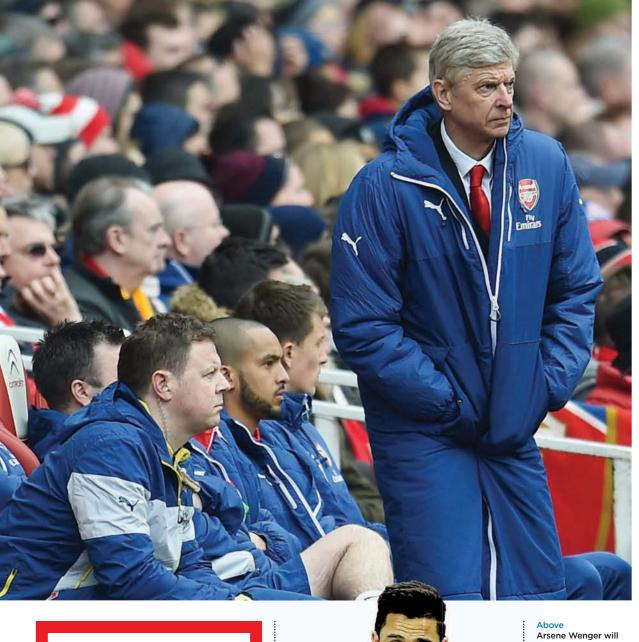
THIS YEAR

Record:	24-7-7
Home:	14-3-2
Away:	10-4-5
Finish:	2nd

LAST YEAR

27-5-6
17-1-1
10-4-5
1st





ARSENAL NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Alexis Sánchez Olivier Giroud 14 Santi Cazorla Aaron Ramsev 6 Theo Walcott

TOP ASSISTS

Santi Cazorla 11 Alexis Sánchez **Aaron Ramsey** Mesut Özil Olivier Giroud

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

36

THIS YEAR

Record: 22-9-7 Home: 12-5-2 Awav: 10-4-5 Finish: 3rd

LAST YEAR

Record: 24-7-7 Home: 13-5-1 11-2-6 Awav: Finish: 4th



look to build on a strong season and with a few reinforcements, Arsenal could be pushing for the title in 2016

Fly Emirates

Alexis Sanchez played some remarkable football and led the Gunners with 16 goals

"LOSING **ONLY A** HANDFUL OF **TIMES AFTER JANUARY 1.** THE SECOND HALF OF THE **SEASON WAS ARSENAL'S** ON A SONG."

ARSENAL - RINSE, REPEAT

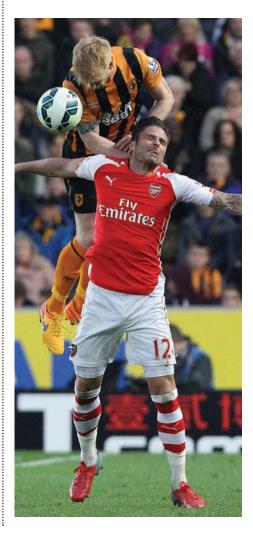
t was more of the same for Arsenal in 2014-15 - a sluggish first half of the season and a superb second. Talk of a late challenge to Chelsea never really materialised but there was enough to suggest Arsene Wenger could fashion an assault on first place next year - providing he strengthens the side in the necessary positions. 'Twas ever thus.

With Wenger having been in the Gunners dugout for so long, it is perhaps inevitable that the same storylines play out over and over. In this case it's the club's desperate need for a destructive midfielder, a bit of unwavering steel to go with the silk of Mesut Ozil, Santi Cazorla and Jack Wilshere, who at times produced some beautiful football. Francis Coquelin took most people by surprise with his performances in the role after returning from a loan spell at Charlton Athletic, but it's generally agreed he isn't the long-term

There was, though, no absence of that desire in attack, thanks to the presence of Alexis Sanchez. Signed in the summer from Barcelona - and from under the noses of Liverpool - Alexis is perhaps the closest player there is to Luis Suarez. It took the Chile international a few games to get going but when he found his feet it was immediately clear the £35m paid to Barca was money well

Alexis' pre-Christmas goals came as Arsenal struggled. They ended 2014 outside the top four and looked in genuine danger of missing out on Champions League qualification for the first time under the long-serving Wenger. A change in goalkeeper, Wojciech Szczesny dropped for disciplinary reasons as much as anything else. coupled with the introduction of Coquelin, helped galvanise the team, and ended returning complaints about Wenger's continued presence. It was the same pattern as the year before - and the year before that.

Losing only a handful of times after January 1, the second half of the season was Arsenal's equivalent of going out on a song. It meant a good impression was left, the doubters silenced for the summer and the troubles from August to December largely forgotten - until, that is, they reappear in 2015-16. But Wenger may have found a blueprint for competing with Chelsea and it couldn't be clearer where the team needs to improve. Whether or not Wenger breaks with this well-established but ultimately unwelcome tradition is another matter entirely.



MANCHESTER UNITED - RED DEVILS RE-LEARNING



t was a year of recovery for Manchester United as, under Louis van Gaal, they began the long slog back towards the top of the Premier League following a misspent nine months under David Moyes.

Van Gaal's appointment was confirmed prior to the World Cup and in guiding the Netherlands to third place, the experienced manager offered an insight into what was to come - tactical flexibility, players fielded in unfamiliar roles and unconventional decisions. De Oranje went 3-5-2 in Brazil, not the traditional Dutch 4-3-3, Dirk Kuyt was used as a right-wing-back and Tim Krul was brought off the bench for the quarterfinal penalty shootout with Costa Rica, raising eyebrows from Amsterdam to Manchester. Similarly, after he took over at Old Trafford, Van Gaal vacillated between three at the back and four, used Ashley Young as a left-sided defender and more than once preferred rookie James Wilson to on-loan Radamel Falcao. But after United struggled with three defenders, Van Gaal's decision to return to four worked out, Young proved to be one of United's better players of the season and Falcao showed nothing to suggest he was a better option than the youngster Wilson. Van Gaal was, on the whole, and despite some rocky patches, proven right.

A return to the Champions League was the objective, and it was achieved with time to spare. Van Gaal had to mix, match and makedo at times, unable to get a consistent XI on the pitch as his defence was decimated and midfield mauled by injury. Falcao was neither use nor ornament and Robin van Persie struggled for form and fitness, leaving captain Wayne Rooney shouldering the burden in attack - and sometimes midfield.

Rooney occasionally deputised for Michael Carrick and United looked a different team when the former Tottenham Hotspur playmaker was available to knit things together in his calm, technical manner, with Ander Herrera showing signs he could be Carrick's long-term successor. Marouane Fellaini definitely won't be but Van Gaal got more out of the Belgium international than his predecessor - ironic considering Fellaini thrived at Everton under Moyes.

Although Van Gaal answered many of the questions around the United side as the season went on, some issues lingered on unresolved. David De Gea looked increasingly bound for Real Madrid as speculation persisted and no new contract was signed, and record signing Angel di Maria had a difficult time on and off the pitch. Memphis Depay's arrival was at least confirmed before the season's end as Van Gaal's recovery mission continued apace.

"ALTHOUGH LOUIS **VAN GAAL ANSWERED** MANY OF THE **OUESTIONS** AROUND THE SIDE AS THE SEASON WENT ON. **SOME ISSUES** LINGERED ON UNRESOLVED."

Van Gaal stamped his mark on the new Man. United and will look to chase for the title next

Rooney's strong form and leadership helped spur Man. United to a Champions League Spot.

MAN. UTD NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Wayne Rooney	12
Robin Van Persie	10
Juan Mata	9
Ander Herrera	6
Marouane Fellaini	6

TOP ASSISTS

Angel Di Maria	10
Ashley Young	5
Wayne Rooney	5
Ander Herrera	4
Juan Mata	4

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

62

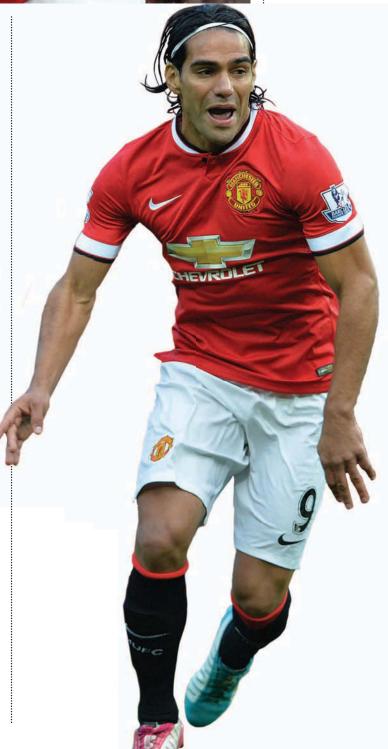
37

THIS YEAR

20-10-8
14-2-3
6-8-5
4th

LAST YEAR

Record: 19-7-12 Home: 9-3-7 10-4-5 Away: Finish: 7th



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RESTOFTH

There were under-performers and over-achievers in the 2014-15 Premier League season, as Luca Persico



Above

Harry Kane's emergence at Tottenham helped them to sneak into fifth place

Steven Gerrard endured a miserable final few months to his Liverpool career, as the Reds failed to replace Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge's goals

Below Alan Pardew's return to Crystal Palace inspired a steady surge up the Premier League standings and away from relegation fears

" A SOBERING

INCONSISTENT

AND STEVEN

GERRARD'S

TIME AT THE

CLUR."

END TO AN

SEASON





















くいは TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR: SPURRED BY KANE

Led by the goals of Harry Kane, Spurs ended the season with a respectable finish. Manager Mauricio Pochettino will be satisfied with his maiden campaign, but also frustrated with his team's inconsistencies, particularly in defence. The performances of Kane. plus Christian Eriksen and the emerging Ryan Mason offer hope for the future.

:加 LIVERPOOL: SHORT ON FIREPOWER

A largely forgettable campaign for Liverpool. After selling Luis Suarez to Barcelona in the summer, Brendan Rodgers' rebuilding will be questioned. An injury to Daniel Sturridge was untimely, but the final day mauling at Stoke City was a sobering end to an inconsistent season and Steven Gerrard's time at the club.



Arguably, the surprise of the season. Following the departure of Pochettino and a host of key players, the Saints were amongst the favourites for the drop. The arrival of Ronald Koeman and smart reinvestment however, made them unlikely contenders for a top four finish for much of the campaign.

: ग्रितः SWANSEA CITY: SUBTLE SURPRISE

Garry Monk built on the good work by predecessors Roberto Martinez, Brendan Rodgers and Michael Laudrup to steer Swansea to a top 10 finish. He managed to cope with the loss of Wilfried Bony to Manchester City in January and has a team that still entertains, but also now has a steely edge

に対け STOKE CITY: SOLID AND STRONG

Mark Hughes continues to quietly rebuild his reputation at Stoke. With an outlay of just £1.58m, he has built a side that plays to his strengths and can entertain, as well as stifle. The loss of Bojan Krkic to serious injury just as he was starting to influence was unfortunate, but Peter Crouch and Charlie Adam had memorable campaigns.

CRYSTAL PALACE: CLEAR AND CONCISE

The January arrival of Alan Pardew, a former Palace player, turned their season around. Under Neil Warnock, they had been inconsistent and flirted with relegation. Pardew got the best out of forward Glenn Murray, while Yannick Bolasie and Jason Puncheon were also excellent, particularly towards the ends of the season.

ያ ክ ክ ቁቷያ EVERTON: STICKY TOFFEES

A disappointing campaign for Everton. Big money signing Romelu Lukaku struggled for form, while an ageing defence was exposed in the opening rounds. The performances of defender John Stones and Gareth Barry were rare highlights, but too many key players underwhelmed.

WEST HAM UNITED: STEADY IF UNSPECTACULAR

Sam Allardyce's final season at West Ham ended with a respectable 12th place finish. New signings Diafra Sakho, Aaron Cresswell and Enner Valencia showed their worth, while the Hammers will be in next season's Europa League due to their fair play record.

上京以 WEST BROMWICH ALBION: SAFE AND ASSURED

Another club who benefitted from a managerial change. Tony Pulis replaced Alan Irvine in January and promptly steered West Brom to safety. The Welsh tactician got the best out of big money flop Brown Ideye, as well as Saido Berahino, while a win at Old Trafford against Manchester United highlighted his ability to put together an organised outfit.

LEICESTER CITY: LATE BLOOMERS

Leicester were bottom for much of the campaign, but rallied with seven wins in their final 10 matches to ultimately end up in 14th. The signing of veteran Esteban Cambiasso was a real masterstroke, while manager Nigel Pearson's desire to attack and a strong home following made them a real force in the closing rounds.



Right

Newcastle fans had to endure a difficult season and continue to push for owner Mike Ashley to leave

Bottom

A very expensive squad proved unable to gel on the pitch, and relegation was not a surprise, but an inevitable consequence













"A TRANSFER
CAMPAIGN
THAT HAD
BROUGHT
IN SOME BIG
NAMES FAILED
TO YIELD ANY
CONSISTENCY"

NEWCASTLE UNITED: TROUBLED TOON

A disastrous campaign ended with Jonas Gutierrez, fittingly after his battle with cancer, netting the decisive goal against West Ham to keep them up on the final day. After being steered to apparent safety by Alan Pardew, before he departed, his replacement John Carver oversaw a run that almost saw Newcastle relegated.



SUNDERLAND: SNEAKING OUT OF TROUBLE

After Sunderland had laboured under Gus Poyet for much of the campaign, the arrival of Dick Advocaat was decisive in them avoiding the drop. The veteran tactician built a team that was ruthlessly disciplined and organised and did enough to secure safety.

ASTON VILLA: INVIGORATED VILLANS

After flirting with relegation under Paul Lambert, the decision to bring in Tim Sherwood as a replacement had the desired effect. His more expansive approach got the best out of his admittedly limited squad, with Christian Benteke returning to form and midfielder Jack Grealish emerging as a player to watch.

HULL CITY: LAST DAY DESPAIR

Hull went down on the final day, but may feel they should have survived. Steve Bruce's side never managed to pull away from the bottom places and suffered with the loss of Nikica Jelavic to injury. The January arrival of Dame N'Doye offered hope, but too many big signings failed to impress.

BURNLEY: BELLIGERENT BUT BEATEN

Sean Dyche's side fought valiantly, but ultimately fell short. His reliance on team spirit, discipline and organisation was rewarded with a good campaign, but he may regret not investing more. The emergence of Danny Ings was a highlight.

QUEENS PARK RANGERS: COSTLY AND CHAOTIC

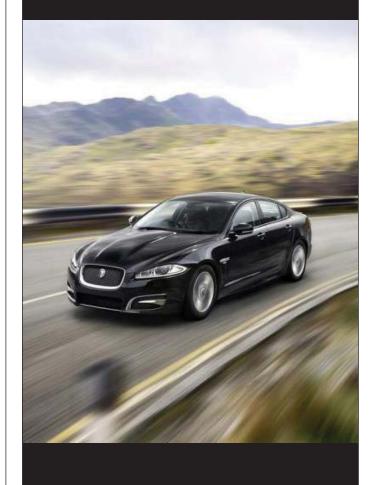
Under first Harry Redknapp, then Chris Ramsey, QPR were largely unimpressive. A transfer campaign that had brought in some big names failed to yield any consistency and they were disappointing throughout. A huge rebuild is now required.



JAGUAR LAND ROVER THORNHILL







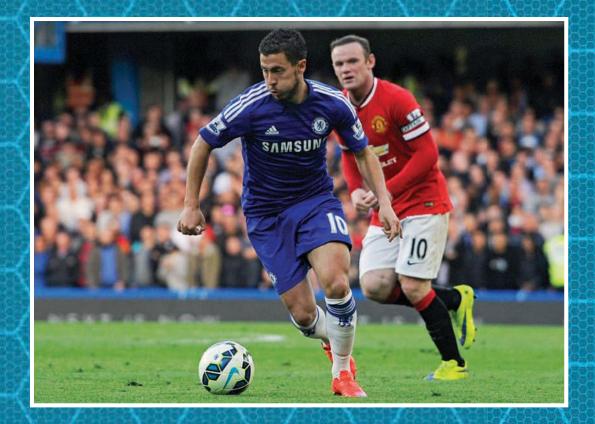




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Eden Hazard has developed into an effective and deadly weapon at Chelsea, to make him one of the Premier League's biggest names. By Luke Tadgell

sophisticated in Europe - reducing the impact of their forward's absence. Take their game at the Emirates this year, for example. In an eerie replication of their result there the previous season, Chelsea arrived in North London with the intention of containing Arsenal, thereby taking the point that was necessary to end the Gunners' winning streak and all but conclude the title race. Sure enough, they became the first team to prevent Arsenal scoring at home all season. The previous year, as mentioned, Mourinho understood that any ambitions of freewheeling fancy must be curbed to achieve success in his second spell at the club, and sure enough better results followed, the first being a predictably soporific 0-0 draw with Arsenal.

But even with a defensive record as impressive as Chelsea's - 17 clean sheets and 32 goals conceded - they have needed someone to propel them past the opposition at the other end, and here is where Hazard has proved pivotal. Though not always the case, and certainly not too often during the first half of the season, Chelsea have opted for pragmatism, presenting a practical, utilitarian outfit that best suits their squad's assets. And often in these moments, Hazard has provided a moment of quicksilver brilliance to decide a tie, while also contributing to the team's overall function.

It's interesting to contrast this Hazard, who is unanimously recognised as the Division's standout performer in the form of accolades both physical and verbal, with the liability Mourinho threw under the bus after the concession of an avoidable Arda Turan goal at home to Atletico Madrid last year. Then, Chelsea had the opportunity to reach a third Champions League Final, but were disposed of by Diego Costa, Thibaut Courtois and Filipe Luis' former employers at the semi-final stage. European success did not beckon for a Chelsea team Mourinho acknowledged as being in transition, and the naivety Hazard displayed that night, and his Coach's willingness to call him out on it, are at odds with the level of discipline he has cultivated since.

It is testimony to Mourinho, who almost always shields his players from external criticism, that match in world football, he has drawn more fouls mirror last season's match in world football.

his public shaming of Hazard preceded positive results the following season, but credit also belongs to the player. He has found a level of maturity that signals a talismanic future. For instance, observe some of the closest and most important contests Chelsea have been involved in this season. By the time Manchester United visited Stamford Bridge in the middle of Spring, Chelsea were confident enough in their ability to absorb pressure, and suitably aware of Manchester United's possession-based game under Louis van Gaal, that they surrendered the ball as part of their tactic of controlled subjugation, allowing United over 70 per cent possession. This tactic was successful in that their defence was not breached, but significantly they took all three points as the Belgian charged into the box and scored passed the League's best goalkeeper, David de Gea, with considerable composure. This was the standout offensive moment of Chelsea's game, and could not have been conjured by anyone else on that pitch. Similarly, in a tight encounter with Arsenal, the breakthrough came from one of Hazard's signature expeditious dribbles into the box, his speed confusing Laurent Koscielny, who could do little other than to block his path, Hazard's momentum seeing him fly to the ground. In what has become something of a trademark, he would convert the subsequent penalty with an equanimity that involves him watch the goalkeeper move, in this instance Wojciech Szczęsny, while rolling the ball in the opposite direction. It is telling that, with the uniquely deft,

close control perhaps only Lionel Messi can match in world football, he has drawn more fouls from opponents than any other player. This frequency with which Hazard finds himself sent to the turf might not be conducive to a long career free from injury, but the ability to commit defenders and upset the opposition's defensive structure is invaluable.

Statistically, this season largely resembles his last, with 14 goals and nine assists. But while he struggled to influence games towards the end of last season, not registering an assist from March onwards, this term he has been decisive. Where previously he appeared to dwell on the ball, and his distribution was erratic, now he carefully targets space and his overall movement is more constant. This might be a consequence of a tactical tweak enabling him to operate more centrally, relieving him of certain onerous defensive responsibilities. Regardless, seven of his goals have secured a result, whether that be a draw or a one-goal victory, and thus his worth is easier to quantify than other Player of the Year candidates, with involvement in goals against the next six best-placed sides - Manchester City, Arsenal, Manchester United, Liverpool, Tottenham and Southampton.

Hazard is a world talent with youth on his side, and in light of Luis Suarez's departure to Camp Nou and Sergio Aguero's episodic injuries, he is the most thrilling talent English football has to offer. Fortunately for Chelsea, in a team that requires a spark to compliment their rather mechanical personnel, he is all theirs.

Lett (Opposite Page)
Hazard's basic statistics
mirror last season's,
but they hide a more
decisive impact from
the 24-year-old

Above

Eden Hazard's skill with a ball at his feet has terrorised Premier League defences during 2014-15



A I R W A Y S

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A late burst of nine goals in the final 10 matches secured the top scorer crown for Manchester City's Sergio Aguero. The Argentine, who is arguably the Premier League's most lethal forward, was hampered by injury earlier in the campaign, but was unplayable at his best. Aguero's chief rival would have been Diego Costa, had he featured more regularly. The Brazilian born Spain international hit 20 goals in just 26 appearances, but a combination of injuries and suspension limited his involvement. With more playing time, he would have surely matched Aguero's tally.

matched Aguero's tally.
Undoubtedly, the revelation of the campaign was Harry Kane, who was one of three English goalscorers at the top end of the standings. After waiting until November for his first goal, he netted 21 times to leave £26.4m Spaniard Roberto Soldado firmly out the picture.

The other two English players are

The other two English players are Queens Park Rangers' Charlie Austin and West Bromwich Albion's Saido Berahino. The former contributed 43 per cent his team's goals - more than any other player. Berahino, meanwhile, appeared distracted at times by off-field transfer rumours, but still managed

The Arsenal duo of Alexis Sanchez and Olivier Giroud grew in importance as the campaign progressed. The 30 goals they netted between them helped the Gunners flirt with a top two finish. Sanchez, in particular, was outstanding throughout, with his energy and enthusiasm making him the focal point of the side. Chelsea midfielder and PFA Player of the Year Eden Hazard matched Giroud's tally of 14 goals, while Christian Benteke's late rally following the

arrival of manager Tim Sherwood was decisive in Aston Villa's successful push for survival. Southampton's Graziano Pelle also showed his worth in his maiden Premier League campaign, with a respectable return of 12 goals.

AGUERO NUMBERS

ILAN	OOALS
 Independiente 	
2002-03	0
2003-04	0
2004-05	5
2005-06	18
Athletico Madrid	
	6
2006-07	6
2007-08	19
2008-09	17
2009-10	12
2010-11	20
•Manchester City	
2011-12	23
2012-13	12
2013-14	17
2014-15	26
Total Club Goals	78
Total International Cools	27

"A LATE
BURST OF
NINE GOALS
IN THE FINAL
10 MATCHES
SECURED THE
TOP SCORER
CROWN FOR
MANCHESTER
CITY'S
SERGIO
AGUERO"

2014/15 CAMPAIGN

LEAGUE TABLE

TEAM	W	D	L	PTS
Chelsea	26	9	3	87
Manchester City	24	7	7	79
Arsenal	22	9	7	75
Manchester United	20	10	8	70
Tottenham Hotspur	19	7	12	64
Liverpool	18	8	12	62
Southampton	18	6	14	60
Swansea City	16	8	14	56
Stoke City	15	9	14	54
Crystal Palace	13	9	16	48
Everton	12	11	15	47
West Ham United	12	11	15	47
West Bromwich Albion	11	11	16	44
Leicester City	11	8	19	41
Newcastle United	10	9	19	39
Sunderland	7	17	14	38
Aston Villa	10	8	20	38
Hull City	8	11	19	35
Burnley	7	12	19	33
Queens Park Rangers	8	6	24	30

TOP GOALSCORERS

PLAYER
Sergio Agüero
Harry Kane
Diego Costa
Charlie Austin
Alexis Sánchez
Olivier Giroud
Saido Berahino
Eden Hazard
Christian Benteke
David Silva
Graziano Pellé
Wayne Rooney
Leonardo Ulloa
Nacer Chadli
Wilfried Bony
Mame Diouf
Danny Ings

Papiss Demba Cisse

Christian Eriksen

Yava Touré

G Man. City 26 Tottenham 21 Chelsea QPR 18 Arsenal 16 14 14 14 Arsenal West Brom Chelsea 13 12 Aston Villa Man. City 12 Southampton Man. Utd. 12 Leicester City 11 11 11 **Tottenham** Man. City 11 Stoke City Burnley 11 Newcastle 11 Tottenham 10 Man. City 10

G

18

11

10

10

10

9

9

8

8

8

8

8

8

MOST ASSISTS

DI AVED Cesc Fàbregas

Chelsea Santi Cazorla Arsenal Chris Brunt West Brom Gylfi Sigurdsson Swansea City Ángel Di María Man, Utd Leighton Baines Everton Jordan Henderson Liverpool Eden Hazard Chelsea Sergio Agüero Man. City Oscar Chelsea Jesús Navas Man. City Leicester City Jamie Vardy Matthew Phillips QPR Alexis Sánchez Arsenal West Ham Stewart Downing Raheem Sterling Liverpool Jefferson Montero Swansea City **Dusan Tadic** Southampton David Silva Man. City James Milner Man. City

TOTAL LEAGUE GOALS

GOALS PER MATCH



Qualified for 2015-16 Champions League

Qualified for 2015-16 Europa

Europa League





LARGEST ATTENDANCE





LOWEST ATTENDANCE

Queens Park Rangers vs. Stoke City





16,163

LARGEST GOAL GAP

Southampton vs. Sunderland





HIGHEST GOAL TOTAL

Everton vs. Chelsea





3-6

TEAM OF THE YEAR

David de Gea [Manchester United]: Arguably the difference between Manchester United finishing in the top four and not, De Gea has been Branislav Ivanovic [Chelsea]: Dependable defensively, but also contributed four goals and six assists. He featured in every Premier League match this season. John Terry [Chelsea]: Played every minute of the campaign and led by example. He may be 34 now, but his defensive instincts remain as

Jose Fonte [Southampton]: Only Chelsea conceded fewer goals than Southampton and a large reason for that is Fonte. Always calm, assured and a leader, Cesar Azpilicueta [Chelsea]: Filipe Luis, considered one of Europe's best full-backs last season, was marginalised by the excellent Azpilicueta. The Spaniard has been consistently excellent. Santi Cazorla [Arsenal]: Arguably,

his best season at Arsenal. Cazorla contributed 11 assists and seven

goals to help the Gunners to third. Cesc Fabregas [Chelsea]: Tailed off in the second half of the campaign, but his return of 18 assists is unrivalled. A key part of Chelsea's title triumph.

Alexis Sanchez [Arsenal]: The Chilean proved his worth with an excellent campaign. He managed 16 goals and eight assists and led by example with his all-action

Willian [Chelsea]: An underappreciated player for Chelsea The Brazilian is tactically excellent, but also a clever creative outlet. Eden Hazard [Chelsea]: The League's outstanding player. Hazard contributed 14 goals and nine assists as the key creative force in a very well balanced side. Harry Kane [Tottenham Hotspur]: Didn't score his first League goal until November, but went on to net 21 times. Kane was arquably the revelation of the campaign and was decisive in victories over Arsenal and Chelsea.

MOST KEEPER WINS

PLAYER

Joe Hart David De Gea **Thibaut Courtois** Simon Mignolet Hugo Lloris Lukasz Fabianski Fraser Forster Asmir Begovic David Ospina Adrian Tim Howard Julian Speroni **Brad Guzan** Tim Krul Ben Foster Kasper Schmeichel Woiciech Szczeny Petr Cech Tom Heaton Robert Green

Man. City Man. Utd Chelsea Liverpool Tottenham Swansea Southampton Stoke City Arsenal West Ham Everton Crystal Palace Aston Villa Newcastle West Brom Leicester Arsenal Chelsea Burnley QPR

w

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MOST CLEAN SHEETS

PLAYER

Joe Hart Lukasz Fabianski Simon Mignolet Fraser Forster Thibaut Courtois Costel Pantilimon Ben Foster David De Gea Tom Heaton **Brad Guzan** Tim Krul **Hugo Lloris** Adrian **David Ospina** Asmir Begovic Tim Howard Julian Speroni Kasper Schmeichel Robert Green Allan McGregor

CS Man. City 14 13 Swansea Liverpool 13 13 Southampton 12 Chelsea Sunderland 11 West Brom 11 Man. Utd 10 10 Burnley Aston Villa 9 Newcastle 8 Tottenham 8 8 7 7 West Ham Arsenal Stoke City Everton 6 Crystal Palace 6 Leicester Chelsea







SEEING RED

Spurs' Danny Rose infuriated fans when he took to the pitch against Hull City sporting a new red hairstyle. Fans were unhappy with the choice of colour that matches that of rivals Arsenal and subjected him to a torrent of abuse on social



WONG' ONE

Newcastle released their new strip for the 2015-16 season only to realise that their sponsors (Wonga) have changed their logo. The Magpies will continue with the strip as thousands had already been made before they realised the error and will now be showing off an outdated logo of their sponsors.

EXPENSIVE CELEBRATION

Ipswich's Paul Anderson has offered to pay for a supporter to have his ceiling repaired after celebrations went too far in a living room. Ross Morgan punched the ceiling in delight after Anderson levelled during the Championship Play-off semi-final first leg tie with rivals Norwich.

TICKETS TO SEE WHO!

Middlesbrough fans were dealt a shock when purchasing their Championship Play-off Final tickets when they realised that organisers Wembley Stadium had spelt Middlesbrough wrong. Wembley later issued an apology after spelling 'Middlesborough' instead

NO GOING BACK

Ex-Tottenham 'keeper Heurelho Gomes caused a stir recently when he said that he 'wouldn't recommend Spurs to anyone'. The Brazilian was referring to the treatment he received at the club.

TOLD YOU SO

Poole Town fans are set for a windfall after placing a bet at 50-1 that then striker Charlie Austin would go on to play for England. The QPR striker has been called up to the next England squad and an appearance earns the fans over £7,000.

ROBBO THE ROMANTIC!

A Manchester United fan from Thailand who won a competition to visit Old Trafford made the most of the trip by proposing to his girlfriend pitch-side. To top it off the fan $\,$ arranged for united legend Bryan Robson to stand alongside him and witness the event.





WOULDN'T FIND THESE IN DELIA'S RESTAURANT!

A Norwich fan was in panic just days before his side's Championship Play-off Final with Middlesbrough after realising the dog had chewed up three tickets. Luckily the club sympathised and re-printed in time to see the 2-0 win!



NO LONGER THAI-ED TO THE CLUB

Leicester City had to deal with a bit of a scandal, cutting three players from the roster following a video leak; Tom Hopper, Adam Smith and even James Pearson, son of manager Nigel Pearson, were all cut from Leicester's roster after being filmed taking part in what has been described as a "racist orgy" during the team's visit for a friendly match in Thailand. Not good at all!

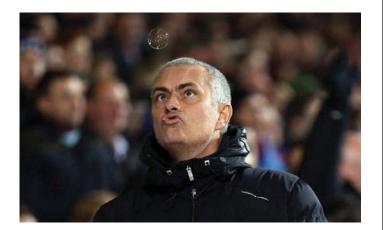




Leicester's Thai owners celebrated the club's Premier League survival by buying a beer for every fan that attended the last home game of the season against QPR. Water was also provided for those that were teetotal!

STICK TO THE DAY JOB

Jose 'The Special One' Mourinho has proved that he is human after all after his embarrassing attempt at singing Chelsea anthem 'Blue is the Colour'. The popular Portuguese stumbled and stuttered over the words as thousands of adoring fans looked on during the club's victory parade.



DID YOU KNOW?

Southampton's Saido Mane not only scored the quickest hat trick in Premier League history against Aston Villa in Week 37, but also his club's first in the top flight since James Beattie's in October 2002 against Fulham in a 4-2 win.

Arsenal failed to have a single shot in the first-half of a Premier League game, when playing Manchester United, for the first time since November 2004 against Liverpool.



A WANTED MAN

Liverpool ace Raheem Sterling is a wanted man, indeed; not only is Liverpool fielding big-money offers for Sterling's services, they're also turning those offers down like they're no big deal: Liverpool reportedly declined on a £40 million from Manchester City, the second offer from the former league champions. Sterling, meanwhile, isn't too worried about these big money offers; he was caught enjoying himself in Ibiza and was caught on camera inhaling nitrous oxide - a.k.a. laughing gas - on a yacht! Sterling, 20, was previously warned by manager Brendan Rodgers regarding his conduct but he won't be around Anfield much longer anyways, so..

DEVILS

The former Manchester United player is skeptical of Red Devil's chances of doing well in Europe. Hargreaves, who lifted the trophy with United in 2008, thinks that the club is nowhere near the level of Bayern Munich, Real Madrid and Barcelona. The former midfielder also thinks that they would also find it hard to dethrone Mourinho's Chelsea.



THE NEW VINNIE JONES?!

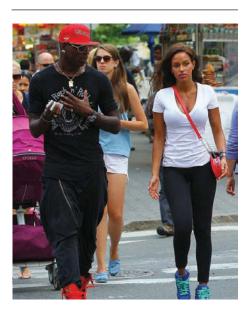
Ex-Aston Villa striker John Carew is set to appear in a Norwegian gangster film titled 'Hovdinger'.



SAMSUNG

MR. RELIABLE

John Terry, captain of Chelsea, was instrumental in the Blues' successful 2015 season campaign, but even that is a bit of an understatement. See, Terry didn't just score crucial goals and defend like a champion: he also played every single minute of every single game this season for his team in the 2014/2015 season. Wow!



LIFE IN ENGLAND

Mario Balotelli has spent quite a few years in England, with both Manchester City and, most recently, with Liverpool. And while Super Mario's relationship with the media has been hot-and-cold, his latest antics is equal parts cheeky and tongue-in-cheek: when a journalist approached him and asked him a question in Italian, Balotelli replied, in Italian as well, saying, "Beware, I don't speak Italian any



YANNICK'S GOT THE MOVES

Crystal Palace winger Yannick Bolasie showed off a bit of flair in an unorthodox way after his team scored an equalizer against Manchester United. One angry fan threw a water bottle Bolasie's way, but the Congolese attacker reacted with unbelievable quickness, deflecting the bottle with an impressive back heel rainbow kick flick! Cheeky!



BEST IN THE COUNTRY

Newcastle United's ex-manager John Carver knew the writing was on the wall at the end of the season, and embraced it wholeheartedly. Not only did Carver proclaim he was the best manager in England, he also banned his players from using the Internet, watching TV and reading newspapers, too. Unfortunately, Carver was promptly let go at the end of the season.

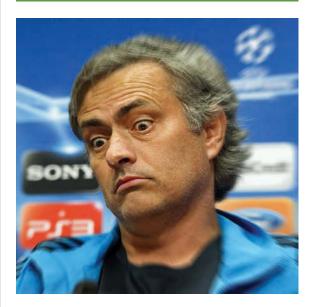
DID YOU KNOW?

John Terry has played every minute this Premier League season - Gary Pallister (1992/93) is the only other outfield player to win the title and play every

Burnley are one of two teams to have played in more than one Premier League season and been relegated each time, the other is Watford.

BY THE NUMBERS

Liverpool scored 52 League goals in 2014-15. Luis Suarez and Daniel Sturridge scored 52 League goals between them in 2013-14. 9



NO MORE PARKING

For those who don't appreciate Jose Mourinho's signature tactical approach when playing defensively, rest easy: Mourinho won't be parking the bus any time soon. Nor will he be parking his own car, since the Chelsea boss was banned from driving for six months after being caught speeding by police near the club's training grounds!

HANGING 'EM UP

England international and Manchester United/QPR regular Rio Ferdinand is calling it quits at the end of the season. Ferdinand announced his retirement and steps away from the game having won six Premier League titles and one Champions League trophy.



ADEBAYOR OPENS UP

Tottenham Hotspur forward Emmanuel Adebayor posted a story on his Facebook page, detailing the hardships he has faced in recent years. It includes a recount of his brother pressing a knife to his throat while he slept, demanding money, as well as reflections on the times he has contemplated suicide. Football is a sport but we often forget that it is played by people, not characters; Adebayor's tale is worth reading.

BY THE NUMBERS

Southampton conceded more than once on the road for the first time since the opening weekend of the 2014-15 Premier League campaign during their 2-1 eat in their Week 33 fixture at Stoke City.



HARRY KANE AND JERMAIN

Tottenham striker Harry Kane is the latest phenom to come through the ranks at Spurs, but the striker credits some of his own childhood icons for his progression, including Jermain Defoe. Kane revealed that when he was 11 years old, Defoe stepped out of his car and played some street footy with Kane and his childhood friends. Years later, Kane has replaced Defoe as Tottenham's top striker.

Quote: "I scored 19 [goals] this season. The season before, I scored 16, so 19 is good, especially as I'm not a pure striker, I'm a winger. It would be nice if I could maybe get 25 goals next season," - Chelsea's Eden Hazard, the PFA Footballer of the Year, on his goalscoring form in 2014/15.

Quote: "I expect to be busy walking from my towel on the beach to the water," - PFA Manager of the Year Jose Mourinho addresses his summer plans to the media.

DID YOU KNO

Manchester United finished the season with the best passing accuracy in the Premier League. The Red Devils found a

The team bottom of the Premier League at Christmas has stayed up for two seasons in a row - Sunderland in 2013-14, Leicester in 2014-15.

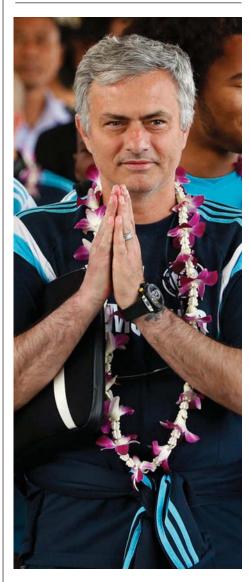
teammate 85.2 per cent of the time.

SCHOOLBOY PRANKS HOLT

BY THE NUMBERS

Manchester United were shown 5 red cards during the 2014-15 season, their joint most ever in a Premier League

A schoolboy recently convinced Wigan striker Grant Holt that he was Burnley manager Sean Dyche. During the conversation the school boy's impersonation of Dyche was so believable that Holt said he would be interested in the move.



MOURINHO WANTS MORE

The Chelsea boss has revealed that he'd want to retain most of his squad that won the double. The Portuguese claimed that it'll be a challenge to keep his best players and they require more competitiveness in the squad. According to Mourinho, the West Londoners need to strengthen the squad and add one player each in defense, midfield and forward

HAZARD MOST VALUABLE

According to the results of the CIES Football Observatory, Eden Hazard is a more valuable player than the Portuguese ace. The Belgian is six years younger to the threetime Ballon d'Or winner, who is valued somewhere between €113.3m and €124.7m. The Blues' stalwart is valued between €135 - €149m, only second to Lionel Messi's staggering numbers (€225 -€280m).





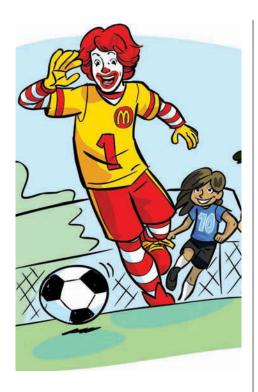
BILLION DOLLAR BRAND

Despite two below average seasons, Manchester United have regained their top position in Brand Finance's Football 50 Brand Value ranking. The Red Devils have leapfrogged Bayern Munich and Real Madrid to become the first football club to be valued at an all time high of \$1.2bn - an incredible growth of 64 percent. Louis van Gaal's men didn't feature in the Champions League in the 2014-15 campaign and thus this analysis shows the true financial power of the world's biggest club.



A ROYAL EFFORT

After missing out on a ticket to the FA Cup Final, an Arsenal fan resorted to desperate measures to secure a seat under the Wemblev arch. Gunners fan Charlie Pearce wrote to the Queen to try and secure seats but unfortunately Her Majesty was unable to assist in the matter.



SUPER SUB

Former Southampton and Blackpool striker Brett Ormerod recently announced that he intended to open a Subway shop in Blackburn. The now 38-year-old, who still plays part time, has applied for a license for the franchise.

BAD DEAL

The Gunners won't get any cash from Barcelona after their treble winning season. Arsenal's former skipper Thomas Vermaelen moved from London to Camp Nou last summer and according to his new contract, the Blaugrana giants are supposed to pay a bonus fee to the North Londoners on winning the Champions League. But Vermaelen did not play for a single minute in the Champions League this season which didn't activate that clause in his contract.





HARD TO GET ALVES

The Brazilian right back has extended his contract with Barcelona which will keep him at the club until 2017. The two-time treble winner was expected to fill in the void in the right back position in LVG's Man United's defense.

DID YOU KNOW?

Manchester City were the only side not to draw 0-0 in 2014-15

Chelsea were top of the Premier League for 274 days during the 2014-15 season, a record for a Premier League campaign.

"MY ANSWER IS
NOT IMPORTANT.
MY ANSWER IS NOT
IMPORTANT BECAUSE
THE OWNER IS THE
OWNER, HE IS THE
PERSON WITH THE
PERSPECTIVE I ADMIRE
A LOT, RESPECT A LOT.
HE RESPECTS A LOT
OF PEOPLE WHO DO
IMPORTANT THINGS
FOR HIM.."

- Mourinho, when asked if the Cech's departure to Arsenal or Manchester United is a possibility.



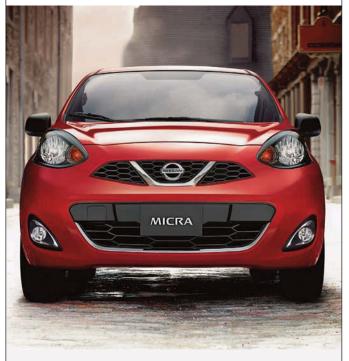
GERRARD ADVICE TO STERLING

The outgoing skipper of Liverpool has a word of advice for Raheem Sterling. The loyal servant to the club, Gerrard believes that it'll be a step down for the young Englishman if he leaves Anfield in the summer.





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thought to be a step toward ending Juventus' domination in Serie A. Instead, as Luca Cetta writes, Massimiliano Allegri picked up where his predecessor left off to deliver another Scudetto.

"JUVE HAD **CLAIMED** A FOURTH **SUCCESSIVE SCUDETTO** WITH FOUR **MATCHES** STILL TO

Álvaro Morata proved a solid striker when Llorente hit his slump

ne tweet seemed to alleviate any fears. "Season 2014-15: Coach Antonio Conte," wrote the official Juventus account. Bianconeri fans breathed a collective sigh of relief. A day earlier the curtain had closed on another memorable season as Juventus broke the 100-point barrier, a Serie A first. During the final match against Cagliari fans played on the Coach's name with cards which read: "Con-te" - with you. The 102-point total led to a third successive Scudetto. Conte had masterminded all three But there were whispers of an impending departure. Milan was said to be in the framework. There Conte could attempt to rebuild an ailing club, just as he had done when joining Juventus in 2011. But why leave a strong club which was constantly growing? Conte felt taking the Turin club to the next step - re-entering the European elite - was beyond an Italian club's capabilities in the current economic climate. "You cannot go to eat at a €100 restaurant with just €10 in your pocket, can you?" he had opined. Conte went on holiday and reconvened for pre-season training on Monday July 14. All appeared well at Vinovo. For 24 hours. Then came the bombshell, via video. "I have decided to terminate my contract with Juventus." Conte announced. "I have matured with time and my feelings led me to make this choice. It may be more difficult to keep winning with Juventus." Juventus was rocked. But President Andrea Agnelli and director general Giuseppe Marotta immediately launched a counter-offensive by appointing Massimiliano Allegri on July 16. It was not a popular decision. Gone was a club icon and in his place arrived a former rival. A Scudetto winner in 2011 with Milan, Allegri's stock had diminished after being sacked in January following poor results. "My aim is to conquer them with results, with hard work, respect and professionalism," Allegri said of wary sceptics at his first Press conference. Leonardo Bonucci remembered starting the





JUVENTUS NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Carlos Tevez 20 Paul Pogba 8 Álvaro Morata Arturo Vidal Fernando Llorente

TOP ASSISTS

Carlos Tevez Claudio Marchisio 6 Andrea Pirlo 5 Stephan Lichtsteiner Álvaro Morata

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

24

THIS YEAR

Record: 26-9-3 Home: 16-3-0 Away: 10-6-3 Finish: 1st

LAST YEAR

Record: 33-3-2 Home: 19-0-0 14-3-2 Awav: Finish: 1st



season 'amid chaos', but said: "we immediately got our heads in the right space and worked hard from the first day to help Allegri." His blueprint was not to rip up Conte's. Rather, it was to build on it. "It is not my intention to revolutionise Juventus' formation and playing system - which works." The Livorno native who would constantly ignore comparisons to his predecessor - stuck with Conte's favoured 3-5-2 system in the opening months, but with his own tinge. It would not be the all-encompassing pressing unit of seasons past, but a more measured Juve which kept hold of the ball for longer periods.

Early use of the three-man defence was partly borne through injuries. However, its method of attack was all Allegri. "The ideas of the Coach took us to the top of the League, which is why I limit myself to passing to [Claudio] Marchisio instead of looking for the long ball," Bonucci noted after the September win over Milan Possession was key.

Marchisio was one of the stars. He effortlessly adapted to Pirlo's role with the veteran sidelined to start the term and Juventus hardly missed a beat. Throughout the campaign the everconsistent Marchisio filled the position in Pirlo's absences, or his regular role alongside the Metronome.

Further afield, Carlos Tevez improved on a fine debut season which had yielded 19 Serie A goals. He bettered that mark. While under Conte the modus operandi was for he and Fernando Llorente to act in tandem, Allegri offered free rein to his Argentinean star. Tevez was his busy best. A tireless worker without possession, he proved deadly with the ball. "With Allegri, I have more freedom of movement than under Conte. Under the previous Coach, we played with two strikers, in fixed positions and close together," Tevez explained. "Under Allegri we only have a fixed position when we don't have the ball, but we're more free to play the way we want to play when

we attack."

The change didn't suit Llorente, who scored with less frequency than his debut campaign. That opened the door for Alvaro Morata. The summer signing from Real Madrid was slowly integrated and after the New Year - especially with the resumption of the Champions League - found his feet and formed a fine pairing with Tevez. After sluggish performances in October yielded three losses in all competitions. Allegri introduced a four-man defence for the first time. It was a shift which reinvigorated the team. Usually lining up in a 4-3-1-2, Juventus experienced immediate joy. Parma was hit for seven and Olympiakos defeated in a key Champions League group

The defence was led admirably by Bonucci. One of Juve's best throughout the campaign, he dispelled doubts about his suitability in a fourman defence. With fellow defenders injured at various parts of the season - and Andrea Barzagli out until March - he held the defence together Summer arrival Patrice Evra also impressed in his first season in Turin.

The boss did not abandon the 3-5-2 completely. Allegri was able to utilise either system when the situation warranted, sometimes within the same game. With Barzagli's return, that was made all the more possible. He could also call upon greater depth than any of Conte's squads. Despite losing versatile pair Kwadwo Asamoah and Romulo to injury, Allegri still had Roberto Pereyra, January arrival Stefano Sturaro, Martin Caceres, Angelo Ogbonna and Simone Padoin, amongst others, in reserve. A conscious effort from management to improve squad depth came to fruition. Even when missing multiple players Juventus had enough cover to ensure the situation was never desperate.

Those early fears were quickly dismissed by Allegri and his team. The hallmarks of this new Juventus were seen in the opening five matches, all won without conceding a goal. That led to

expected to build on a positive first year under Rudi Garcia. Roma finished with a club record 85 points, the 17-point final margin a result of Juve's relentlessness. The capital club had also notched five wins. The game was fraught with controversy Juventus won 3-2, yet Roma felt aggrieved at the concession of all three goals. Afterwards Garcia declared: "We will win the Scudetto." But Juve did not let up and one match sticks out for Allegri: "I'd say the most important result was against Napoli, because we'd lost to them in the Italian Super Cup and were held by Inter. It was a victory of character." It was Juve's first win in Naples since 2000, mere weeks after the shootout defeat in Qatar. Juventus then kept the margin at nine points with a draw at Roma in March. The Scudetto was all but retained. Giorgio Chiellini called the mid-April win over Lazio 'the final step'. The Romans had charged into second spot on the back of an eight-game winning streak. They were brushed aside by a confident Bianconeri, A fortnight later the Old Lady sealed the crown at Sampdoria thanks to Arturo Vidal. Emphatically, Juve had claimed a fourth successive Scudetto with four matches still to play.

the Week 6 showdown with Roma at Juventus

Stadium. Before the season the Giallorossi were

With the Turin club still fighting on three fronts in May it confirmed another triumphant season. The Scudetto substantiated their domestic dominance. And in Europe Allegri really came to the fore. His belief permeated through the squad and was a welcome change to Conte's pessimistic stance.

The upheaval of Conte's sudden departure offered Juve's rivals hope. Allegri's arrival steadied the ship as the club proved on and off the pitch it is ahead of the chasing pack in Serie A and back at Europe's top table.

FROM ZERO TO HERO

well. "The first day with [Massimiliano] Allegri and the President [Andrea Agnelli] in the car, we were greeted at the training ground by spitting, eggs and kicks." He continued: "It was a challenge to turn that attitude around." Turn it around Allegri did. And in some style. Taking over from the hugely popular and successful Conte would be no easy task. The former Milan tactician did so confidently and enamoured himself to those same fans so sceptical and angry upon his appointment. Allegri added to the foundations laid by Conte. He then introduced his own spin. "If I had arrived and immediately tried to remove all the team's certainties, it wouldn't have been very intelligent," he remarked after the Scudetto was sealed.

Allegri's can-do attitude, especially in Europe, proved a welcome change from Conte's harsh reality of Italian clubs' struggles. That he allowed expression and pleasure to seep into the fabric at Vinovo won over the players. His now-iconic tweet after Juventus' comeback Champions League win against Olympiakos helped endear him to the supporters. "We won it all together, suffering as a group with our fans. Now it's all down to us, we can target first place. #fiuuu." - 'fiuuu' Italian for 'phew' Perhaps another tweet sums up his season at the helm: "To take charge of the team on July 15 and lead them to victory again took balls! Thanks Max." It's author? The President, Andrea Agnelli



WAS ROCKED. BUT **PRESIDENT ANDREA AGNELLI AND** DIRECTOR **GENERAL GIUSEPPE** MAROTTA **IMMEDIATELY LAUNCHED** A COUNTER-OFFENSIVE BY APPOINTING ALLEGRI ON **JULY 16"**

"JUVENTUS

Bonucci was one of the

Left

triumph.

standouts for Juventus, leading a defence which faced personnel and tactical changes during the season.

The new Coach had to win over supporters who backed Antonio Conte after three successful seasons. He did so by adding another Scudetto



SERIEA

It was the stuff of dreams for third-placed Lazio, but for Roma, who finished second, and Napoli, who gave away third and fourth, it was a season to forget. Marco D'Onofrio explains.

ROMA - A RATHER AVERAGE CAMPAIGN



Despite qualifying for the Champions League group stage for the second consecutive season under Rudi Garcia, Roma seemed to have regressed during the 2014-15 campaign.

The club came into the season with many believing that they would be able to compete with Juventus for the Scudetto all season long. However, that was not the case as they drew an incredible amount of games to finish 17 points back from the champions.

Roma had a fantastic start to the season winning their first six matches in all competitions, including a victory in their return to the Champions League against CSKA Moscow. Their success on the peninsula and in Europe would quickly dwindle though.

The Giallorossi faded as the season wore on, struggling to compete on multiple fronts. Domestically, Juventus took advantage of Roma's slip-ups and dropped points to quickly pull ahead with Massimiliano Allegri's side never looking back.

While in Europe, Roma did not fare much better. Garcia's men lost a crucial match at home against Manchester City that ultimately saw them eliminated from the competition before even reaching the knockout rounds.

Although they were entered into the Europa League because they finished third in their group, they were embarrassed by Fiorentina in the Round of 16. Roma's return to the continent ended with the club being booed off the pitch at Stadio Olimpico after a 3-0 loss to the Viola, exiting European competition having made very little impact.

However, the club did qualify for the Champions League group stage once again and in the best way possible for their fans.

In the penultimate game of the season, Roma defeated bitter rivals, Lazio, 2-1 to secure second place and potentially could have denied the Biancocelesti the glory of playing in the most important tournament on the continent next year. Serbian midfielder Adem Ljajic and the King of Rome Francesco Totti led the club with eight goals in League play. Although, newcomers Juan Iturbe and Victor Ibarbo hardly made the mark on the team that fans of the Giallorossi would have hoped for, the club are in a decent position to try and topple Juventus next season. There has been much talk over the past few

months of whether Garcia would return to the helm next year, but with the Derby della Capitale victory in late May, the tactician likely saved his job and his vision for the club.

Next year though, fans and management will have higher expectations in both domestic and European competition.





FOR

GOALS AGAINST

54

31

THIS YEAR

 Record:
 19-13-6

 Home:
 10-7-2

 Away:
 9-6-4

 Finish:
 2nd

LAST YEAR

 Record:
 26-7-5

 Home:
 15-3-1

 Away:
 11-4-4

 Finish:
 2nd

"PAPERS MADE ROMA INTO A
CANDIDATE FOR THE SCUDETTO,
BUT THE SEASON SHOWED
THE DIVIDE IS TOO BIG FOR
US. THERE'S NO POINT TAKING
FANS FOR A RIDE. WE WON OUR
TOURNAMENT, WHICH WAS
BETWEEN 19 TEAMS."

LAZIO - THE FAIRYTALE THAT CAME TRUE



to get Lazio back into the Champions League

Brazilian, Felipe Anderson, has been one of the League's standout players this season.

"I ALWAYS **SAID MY TEAM WAS** SPECIAL, A **SIDE WITH** HIGH MORAL **VALUES"**

ninth place finish in the League last season Aninth place Tinish in the League less less left fans frustrated and aggravated, but Stefano Pioli has done what many thought was once impossible. Not only was he able to help the Eagles qualify for the Champions League for the first time since 2007-08, he also led them to a Coppa Italia Final and has given them reason to believe again.

With the brilliant play up front from the likes of Brazilian Felipe Anderson and the World Cup's all-time leading goal scorer Miroslav Klose, the club were able to become a relevant force in Serie A again, scaring opposing defences across the peninsula. The team scored an impressive 71 goals, with Anderson and Klose combining for

While the dynamic duo were able to find the back of the net at will this season, the club did not have to solely rely on the pair for offensive production. Lazio became the first team this year in Europe's top five Leagues to have five or more players score at least seven goals.

Defensively, the team also looked stellar, with goalkeeper Federico Marchetti boasting a solid campaign. Only Juventus and Roma conceded fewer goals than Lazio, who allowed in a remarkable 16 less goals compared to a year ago. The club brought in Dutch international Stefan de Vrij in the summer from Feyenoord and Serbian international Dusan Basta from Udinese to help shore up issues they had at the back last season. Both have been brilliant and were a big reason for the capital club's strong defensive record. After heartbreaking losses to Juventus in the Coppa Italia Final and Roma in the Derby della Capitale, many had expected to see a late season collapse from the Bianocelesti. However, in the biggest game of the season and in the hostile atmosphere of the San Paolo, Pioli's men proved to the world they are the real deal. Rafa Benitez's last 90 minutes at the helm in

Napoli was completely spoiled when Lazio came to town for the final match of the campaign. By halftime they were up 2-0 and by the end of the match they had qualified for the Champions League. Mission accomplished.

Indeed, the future looks bright for a Lazio side that didn't have much reason to be optimistic a year ago. Pioli has helped change the culture at the club and more success is surely on the way for a team that has finally found their identity.

TOP ASSISTS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Antonio Candreva 9 Senad Lulic Felipe Anderson Miroslav Klose 6 Danilo Cataldi

GOALS FOR

Miroslav Klose

Marco Parolo

Stefano Mauri

Felipe Anderson

Antonio Candreva

GOALS AGAINST

10

10

38

THIS YEAR

Record: 21-6-11 Home: 12-1-6 Awav: 9-5-5 Finish: 3rd

LAST YEAR

Record: 15-11-12 Home: 10-6-3 Awav: 5-5-9 Finish: 9th





NAPOLI - THE BENITEZ ERA MERCIFULLY ENDS



kicked off with Napoli losing to Athletic Bilbao in the Champions League Play-off and it came to a close with the club suffering a devastating loss to Lazio in the final match of the season. Rafa Benitez led the club to deep runs in both the Europa League and the Italian Cup, but he couldn't get his side past the semi-final stage in either competition. Failure to advance further than the penultimate round in both Cup competitions was only made worse by the fact that a team who many had thought would challenge for the Scudetto at the start of the season ultimately finished fifth.

While the Partenopei had a brilliant stretch where they went 10 games undefeated in all competitions, the fact that the highlight of the year for the club was a victory over Juventus in a relatively meaningless Super Cup match in December speaks volumes.

Napoli came into the season with far too much talent and depth to have spent the majority of the year merely fighting for a spot in the Champions League next year. They didn't even accomplish that.

Their biggest issue had always been defence and Benitez did little to address it in his two years at the helm. The club conceded more than double the amount of goals than the Scudetto champions did, having to pull the ball out of their own net an abysmal 54 times this season. However, when problems at the back were most apparent, Benitez elected to make Manolo Gabbiadini his big January purchase as opposed to another defender. While Gabbiadini has been fantastic, the fact he came at the price of a defender cost the club.

Napoli did add Croatian international full-back Ivan Strinic, in January as well, but he arrived on a free transfer and did not see much action. Their poor back-line was a big reason why the club collapsed down the final stretch on all fronts, dropping important matches to the likes of Empoli, Dnipro, and a Juventus side that had nothing to play for.

The biggest heartbreak of all was saved for Benitez's last match in charge though, as the club allowed four against Lazio at the San Paolo to miss out on the continent's most prestigious club competition next season once again. Fans of the Southern Italian giants will be looking

forward to a fresh start and putting the woes of the Benitez-era behind them.

HAD ALWAYS

"THEIR

BEEN DEFENCE AND BENITEZ DID LITTLE TO **ADDRESS IT IN**

HIS TWO YEARS

AT THE HELM"

BIGGEST ISSUE

Left

Lorenzo Insigne will look to redeem himself after missing out on most of the 2015 campaign.

NAPOLI NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Gonzalo Higuaín José Callejón 11 Manolo Gabbiadini 8 Marek Hamsik **Dries Mertens** 6

TOP ASSISTS

Marek Hamsik 10 **Dries Mertens** Gonzalo Higuaín José Calleión 3 Lorenzo Insigne

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

70

54

THIS YEAR

18-9-11 Record: 11-5-3 Home: 7-4-8 Away: 5th Finish:

LAST YEAR

23-9-6 Record: 13-4-2 Home: 10-5-4 Away:





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To fully appreciate Carlos Tevez's impact in a Juventus shirt, you would need to turn the clocks back to 2012. Fresh from winning their first official Scudetto in nine years, a dark, Alessandro Del Piero-shaped cloud drooped over the Old Lady's plans of building on her unprecedented triumph of an unbeaten season.

The legendary forward had given just shy of two decades' worth of service to Juve and departed as their record appearance holder, but his gradual decline was summed up by Andrea Agnelli's decision to announce only two months into the campaign that the club would not be offering their captain a contract extension.

The President's actions may have been a tad hasty, and understandably so, as he was still a relative newcomer to football politics, but what was more telling was Del Piero's decision to pass on his iconic No 10 jersey, rather than retire it. Suddenly, Agnelli's board were faced with the near-impossible task of finding an able heir.

Then-Coach Antonio Conte looked to eliminate the need for a fantasista with his shift to a 3-5-2 formation for 2012-13, but at the cost of the Bianconeri's goalscoring output, which also exposed their glaring lack of a prolific finisher since David Trezeguet in 2007-08. Thus, the summer 2013 emergence of the oft-enigmatic Carlos Tevez bore fruition.

Although his footballing ability was never in question, a much-publicised refusal to play in a

Neither were there to be signs of any mid-term slowdown, with a further 11 goals in his next 16 appearances. Whether it was winners against Genoa or Fiorentina, getting the ball rolling versus Milan or Lazio or even making sure his side had something to show for themselves in the Derby della Madonnina, you could bet on Tevez's involvement.

Yet, despite his discernible influence in all the above matches, it was his performances against Empoli and Verona that cemented his indispensability to the Juve cause. Wearing down the Hellas resistance with great might, before helping himself to a pair of finely-taken finishes en route to a 4-0 triumph, he replicated that intensity, along with another double, in a hard-fought 2-0 win against the Tuscans.

For a team of the champions' ilk, the likes of Verona and Empoli may seem like fodder on paper, but complacency can creep into one's psyche after a sustained period of success, and in Tevez they have a proven winner, with an untameable stomach for the fight, who is taking the club to the much-vaunted 'next level' - and all for just an initial outlay of €9m.

Aside from his domestic superiority, Tevez also enjoyed his best-ever European campaign. Having scored just six goals in 34 appearances on the continent for both City and Manchester United, he went one better in almost a third of the time. Among his seven strikes came arguably his defining performance in a Juve shirt thus far - the



Carlos Tev transform City truan was confir embodied striker. Liv Serie A's s past nine r

Carlos Tevez's remarkable transformation from Manchester City truant to Juventus talisman was confirmed by a campaign that embodied everything about the striker. Livio Caferoglu profiles Serie A's standout performer of the past nine months.

CARLOSTEVEZ

Champions League game for Manchester City and three-year exile from the Argentine national team meant Juve supporters took their latest splurge in the transfer market with caution. Yet fast forward to the present day and those doubts have been emphatically put to rest.

Arriving for an initial €9m, Tevez was something of a left-field purchase. Juve desperately needed a marquee signing, worthy of donning the No 10 shirt, as Sebastian Giovinco shied away from on his return from Parma, and the new boy duly got to work with 19 League goals in 2013-14. But you got the impression that the attacker still had so much more to give.

In fact, it was a new Coach in Massimiliano Allegri who would unleash the real Tevez. No longer just the 'little' in a little-and-large partnership with Fernando Llorente, with the sole objective of finding the back of the net, he now attacks, defends, creates and leads by example with his work ethic. Simply put, he's become Superman in a black and white cape.

Consequently, the 31-year-old started 2014-15 on fire with six goals in his first five League games, stealing the show with a brace in the controversial, early-season blockbuster against Roma, but he failed to score in his next six. It showed as the Turin giants failed to win half of their matches in that period, although a hat-trick of assists ensured he wasn't totally idle. Nonetheless, barring another mini-drought at the beginning of December, Tevez would leave all before him in their wake, bouncing back with arguably Serie A's goal of the season in Juve's 7-0 demolition of Parma. Holding off a challenge in his own half, he proceeded to race past the Gialloblu defence and bury a deft finish past

By then, it had already occurred to the Bianconeri that Tevez was quickly becoming Juve's most important player. While in previous seasons the side tended to struggle against more-reserved outfits, Apache's unique fusion of contrasting styles not only separated him from many of his fellow stars, but also saw him become the outlet that the Old Lady had craved for so long.

Antonio Mirante.

3-0 victory over Borussia Dortmund. Just two minutes into the second leg of Juve's Champions League Last 16 second leg, the South American rifled his side into the lead with a stunning, long-range drive, before assisting Alvaro Morata for 2-0 and clocking off with a second goal late on. Such nights hadn't been witnessed since the days of his predecessor Del Piero. In the eyes of the tifosi, redemption was earned.

Such is the completeness of his game over the past nine months that there really isn't another player befitting of this award, combining the steely underbelly of a Leonardo Bonucci, the drive of a Paul Pogba, the guile of a Franco Vazquez, the explosive tendencies of a Felipe Anderson and, of course, the indefatigable workrate of a Tevez.

Italy has seen its fair share of great Argentine frontmen over the years, from Julio Libonatti and Diego Maradona to Hernan Crespo and Gabriel Batistuta, and surely Tevez will be revered in the same way as his fellow countrymen, providing he can see out the remainder of his contract, which expires next season, in similar vein to the incumbent campaign.

If the world was a fair and just place, Tevez's performances throughout the season would surely make him a shoe-in to contest next year's Ballon d'Or. However, for many Calcio enthusiasts, Wesley Sneijder's inexplicable failure in 2010, despite the midfielder leading Inter to a treble and Netherlands to the World Cup Final that summer, still lingers on. Throw into the mix Tevez's advancing years and

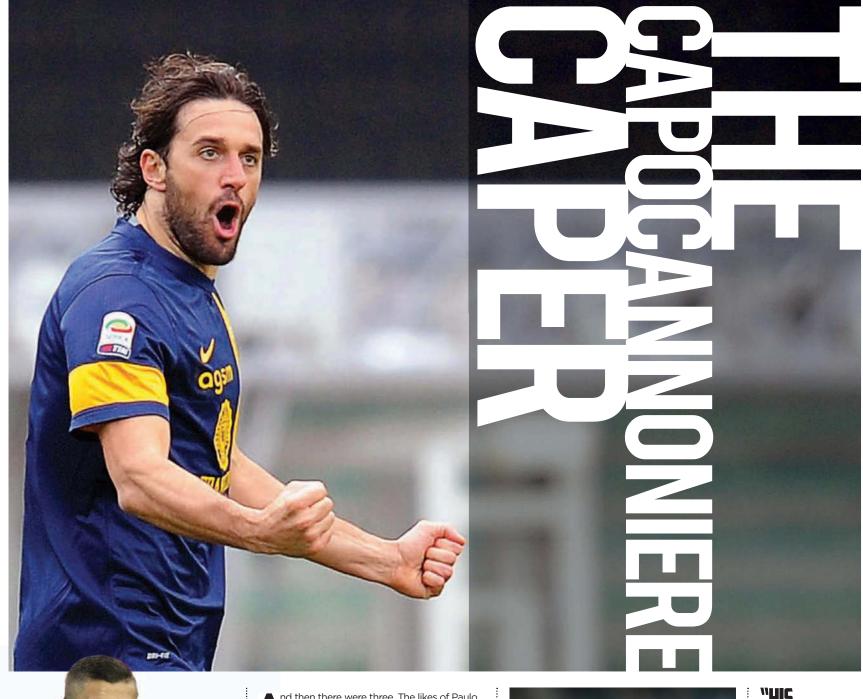
chequered reputation, the notion of recognition from the powers that be seems even farfetched – not that he will be too disheartened, for this is a man who has spent much of his life spitting blood just to provide for his family after a two-month stretch in intensive care as a child.

Tevez's wish to play out the twilight of his career with Boca Juniors has been well-documented but, unlike previous years, Juve don't appear to be allowing lightning to strike twice, as seen by their reported pursuit of Paulo Dybala and first options on Simone Zaza and Domenico Berardi. Either way, let's enjoy him while we can.





IRELI



And then there were three. The likes of Paulo Dybala, Jeremy Menez and Domenico Berardi may have sought to grab the headlines for themselves with their moments of solo brilliance, but there's also a reason why Carlos Tevez, Mauro Icardi and Luca Toni have all pulled clear of their rivals in the race to be crowned Serie A's top goalscorer.

Tevez took an early lead in the Capocannoniere rankings with six strikes in his first five matches, including braces against Atalanta and Roma, but two droughts between mid-October and early November and for most part of December saw others begin to draw closer. Nonetheless, he cemented his position among the League's best marksmen with a consistent return since the turn of the year.

His fellow Argentine, meanwhile, rarely found the net more than once in a match throughout the season, but – barring a freak October slump – his penchant for picking up points with his goalgetting ability meant he never embarked on a drought of more than three games.

However, without doubt, the most impressive goalscoring story of the season lies with Toni. Understandable concerns of the veteran's top-flight suitability were raised when he scored just three goals by the start of December, but he would then silence his critics with 17 in his next 21, including pairs against esteemed opponents such as Genoa and Napoli, to keep Verona well afloat.



"HIS PENCHANT **FOR PICKING UP POINTS** WITH HIS GOAL-**GETTING ABILITY MEANT HE NEVER EMBARKED** ONA DROUGHT **OF MORE THAN THREE GAMES"**





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REST OF LEAGUE

Alasdair Mackenzie runs through fifth to 20th place in Serie A, summing up a season of emerging stars and unexpected surprises.



Above

Pippo Inzaghi failed to provide the motivation and know-how to arrest an ageing Milan squad's slide down the table

Right

Genoa and Sampdoria The city of Genoa had much to shout about this season, as both clubs were in the fight for European qualification until the end, playing some great football

Below

Roberto Mancini returned to Inter, but was unable to galvanise the Nerazzurri to greater than mid-table

"IT WAS

A SEASON

TO FORGET

ROSSONERI

AND PIPPO

INZAGHI HAS

PAID THE

PRICE"

FOR THE



















FIORENTINA: FINAL HURDLE FAULTS

It has been a season of ifs and buts in Florence as the Viola have fallen just short of their objectives. Champions League qualification and a spot in the finals of the Europa League and Coppa Italia were all within touching distance, but none achieved. However, Vincenzo Montella has a project of emerging potential.

GENOA: GOING PLACES

An impressive season for the Grifone saw them achieve their best Serie A finish since 2009. Doubts remain over whether a UEFA license will be awarded for next season, but their League performances have earned a European adventure. Iago Falque's glut of goals and assists made him one of the buys of the season.



Unfortunately for Sampdoria, it appears that their reward for a successful season is seeing Coach Sinisa Mihajlovic leave to Napoli. The Serbian guided them to an impressive seventh-place finish, got the best out of the likes of Eder and Roberto Soriano, and recorded memorable wins over Genoa, Roma, Fiorentina and Inter.

INTER: WORK IN PROGRESS

It was a hugely tumultuous season for the Nerazzurri. Roberto Mancini replaced Walter Mazzarri in November and big names Lukas Podolski and Xherdan Shaqiri soon followed, but the results didn't. Mauro Icardi's goals have kept them ticking over in mid-table, but a large scale rebuilding project is expected over the summer.

TORINO: TURNING IT AROUND

After the sale of Alessio Cerci and Ciro Immobile last summer, many had tipped Toro to struggle. However, wily Coach Giampiero Ventura has overseen an unprecedented run to the Europa League Last 16, which included a stunning 5-4 aggregate win over Athletic Club. on top of a respectable League finish.

MILAN: RED-FACED ROSSONERI



Similarly to their neighbours, it was a season to forget for the Rossoneri and Pippo Inzaghi has paid the price. With Silvio Berlusconi looking to sell the club, it looks like an entirely new Milan era is about to begin, which few members of the current squad are likely to be a part of.

[[日本] PALERMO: PATIENT AND PROUD

It has been a very encouraging return to the top flight for Palermo. The partnership of Franco Vazquez and Paulo Dybala has been one of the highlights of the season and with the latter's departure, the Rosanero will have the funds to further establish themselves in Serie A.

了行证SASSUOLO: SUPER SURVIVALISTS

For the second season running, Eusebio Di Francesco's side have achieved safety while playing eye-catching football. Domenico Berardi and Simone Zaza have again been central to the Neroverdi's success, scoring 23 goals between them, but it looks unlikely that both will remain at the club next season.

上京: VERONA: VETERAN VELOCITY

Despite spending the majority of the season in the lower echelons of the table, Verona managed to avoid ever entering the drop zone. Incredibly, 38-year-old Luca Toni supplied 21 goals to fire them to safety, but Andrea Mandorlini may need to start identifying the veteran's successor for next season.

以前: CHIEVO: IMPENETRABLE DONKEYS

Like their city rivals, avoiding relegation was the aim for the Flying Donkeys and it has once again been achieved. After Eugenio Corini was sacked in October, Rolando Maran stepped in to guide the Gialloblu to safety in characteristically pragmatic style, as they conceded fewer goals than any team outside the top three.



Right

Maurizio Sarri's team defied early-season predictions to not only avoid relegation, but do so playing their own eye-catching style

Dolow

It proved to be a season to forget for Parma, and it could be the last for a while in the top flight













"IT'S BEEN A
MISERABLE
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PARMA. ONLY
A YEAR SINCE
FINISHING
SIXTH, THE
DUCALI FIND
THEMSELVES
BANKRUPT
AND
RELEGATED"

EMPOLI: STYLE AND SAFETY

It was a season to remember for Maurizio Sarri's side, who achieved above and beyond what was expected of them. Safety was managed with an attractive style of football and Mirko Valdifiori has even worked his way into the Azzurri setup. Italy fans will be praying Sarri continues at the helm for part season.



UDINESE: UP AND ALMOST DOWN

Andrea Stramaccioni will be frustrated at recording such a low finish in his first season at the Stadio Friuli. Inconsistency has plagued the Zebrette, whose form has seen a steady slide since battling for Europe early in the campaign. However, Antonio Di Natale has continued to score and Allan has developed into a quality midfielder.

ATALANTA: ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Mission accomplished for Atalanta. Stefano Colantuono was sacked in March with La Dea embroiled in a relegation fight, but the experienced Edy Reja stepped in to oversee a narrow escape. The Orobici faithful will expect more from their experienced squad and it could be a busy summer of transfer activity.

[記記] CAGLIARI: CHAOS MANAGEMENT

No one expected the Bundesliga new boys to finish bottom at Christmas. After heading out of the winter break in 10th, the side from the Rhineland collapsed and now face the task of not becoming a yo-yo club between Germany's top two divisions.

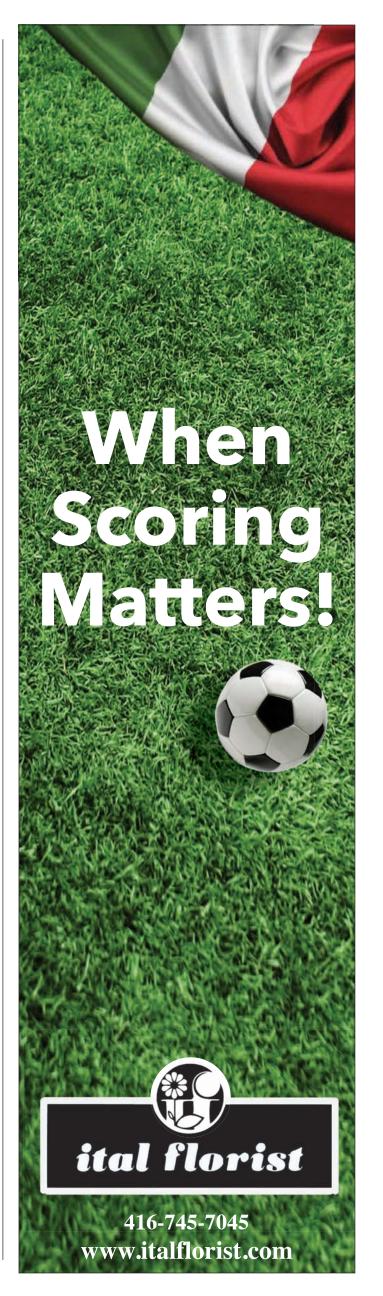
CESENA: CRISIS NOT AVERTED

A year of ups and downs for Cesena ultimately resulted in an immediate return to Serie B. There were some moments of real promise and quality throughout the campaign, but ultimately neither Pierpaolo Bisoli, who was sacked in December, nor Domenico Di Carlo could muster the consistency to stay up.

PARMA: PAYING THE PRICE

It's been a miserable year for Parma. Only a year since finishing sixth, the Ducali find themselves bankrupt and relegated, with unpaid players and staff and not enough money to pay for electricity bills or transport. However, there were some moments to treasure such as a shock win over Juventus.





14/15 CAMPAIGN

LEAGUE TABLE

LLAGGE	IAD.			
TEAM	W	D	L	PTS
Juventus	26	9	3	87
Roma	19	13	6	70
Lazio	21	6	11	69
Fiorentina	18	10	10	64
Napoli	18	9	11	63
Genoa	16	11	11	59
Sampdoria	13	17	8	56
Inter Milan	14	13	11	55
Torino	14	12	12	54
Milan	13	13	12	52
Palermo	12	13	13	49
Sassuolo	12	13	13	49
Verona	11	13	14	46
Chievo	10	13	15	43
Empoli	8	18	12	42
Udinese	10	11	17	41
Atalanta	7	16	15	37
Cagliari	8	10	20	34
Cesena	4	12	22	24
Parma	6	8	24	19

TOP GOALSCORERS

PLAYER		G
Luca Toni	Hellas Verona	22
Mauro Icardi	Internazionale	22
Carlos Tevez	Juventus	20
Gonzalo Higuaín	Napoli	18
Jérémy Menez	AC Milan	16
Manolo Gabbiadini	Napoli	15
Domenico Berardi	Sassuolo	15
Antonio Di Natale	Udinese	14
Miroslav Klose	Lazio	13
Fabio Quagliarella	Torino	13
Paulo Dybala	Palermo	13
lago Falqué	Genoa	13
José Callejón	Napoli	11
Simone Zaza	Sassuolo	11
Felipe Anderson	Lazio	10
Massimo Maccarone	Empoli	10
Marco Parolo	Lazio	10
Antonio Candreva	Lazio	10
Franco Vázquez	Palermo	10
Cyril Thereau	Udinese	10

MOST ASSISTS

PLAYER		Α
Marek Hamsik	Napoli	10
Domenico Berardi	Sassuolo	10
Franco Vázquez	Palermo	10
Paulo Dybala	Palermo	10
Miralem Pjanic	AS Roma	10
Emil Hallfredsson	Hellas Verona	9
Antonio Candreva	Lazio	9
Andrea Bertolacci	Genoa	8
Gonzalo Higuaín	Napoli	7
Senad Lulic	Lazio	7
Carlos Tevez	Juventus	7
Mirko Valdifiori	Empoli	7
Dries Mertens	Napoli	7
Felipe Anderson	Lazio	7
Massimo Maccarone	Empoli	7
Antonio Di Natale	Udinese	7
Mauro Icardi	Internazionale	6
Miroslav Klose	Lazio	6
Ignazio Abate	AC Milan	6
Matías Fernández	Fiorentina	6

TOTAL LEAGUE GOALS

GOALS PER MATCH



Qualified for 2015-16 Europa

Europa League





LARGEST ATTENDANCE

AC Milan vs. Inter Milan





79.173

LOWEST ATTENDANCE

Chievo Verona vs. Cesena





5.000

LARGEST GOAL GAP

Inter Milan vs. Sassuolo





7-0

HIGHEST GOAL TOTAL





TEAM OF THE YEAR

Neto [Fiorentina]: From being exiled mid-season to returning with a clutch of world-class displays, the expiring goalkeeper will be tough act to follow at Fiorentina.

Alessandro Florenzi [Roma]: A midfielder by trade, the 24-year-old quickly provided the solution to Roma's right-back woes. Undoubtedly the Giallorossi's player of the seasor

Leonardo Bonucci [Juventus]: Adapting to a two-man central defence this season, the stopper has arguably overtaken Giorgio Chiellini as Juventus' deep-lying general. Stefan de Vrii [Lazio]: Having joined Lazio on the back of his World Cup performances last summer, the Dutchman seamlessly helped the Aquile compete for the Champions

Matteo Darmian [Torino]: Ensured 2013-14 was no flash in the pan with another impressive campaign that reportedly saw Barcelona come calling, while establishing his place in

Felipe Anderson [Lazio]: Lit up Lazio's Champions League tilt with an abundance of electrifying displays on the right wing. A bright

Paul Pogba [Juventus]: Another successful season and another step towards football's elite for the Frenchman. Juve may have a fight on their hands to keep him this

Mirko Valdifiori [Empoli]: The mastermind behind Empoli's topflight consolidation, the midfielder received rave reviews for his Andrea Pirlo-esque displays and earned Italy

Franco Vazquez [Palermo]: Outshone wantaway Palermo partner Paulo Dybala with a season of influential performances, wonder strikes and an Azzurri debut.

Carlos Tevez [Juventus]: Twentyplus goals, many of them proving decisive, and unequivocal commitment to the Juve cause. Little else can be said about the Argentine.

Luca Toni [Verona]: Continues to confound critics after another hugely-prolific season with Verona Now 38, how much longer can he keep the Gialloblu up?

MOST KEEPER WINS

PLAYER Gianluigi Buffon Morgan Di Sanctis Federico Machetti Mattia Perin Neto Samir Handanovic Rafael Cabral Stefano Sorrentino Andrea Consigli Emiliano Viviano Daniele Padelli **Orestes Karnezis** Albano Bizzarri Luigi Sepe Diego Lopez Marco Sportiello Antonio Mirante Francesco Benussi Zelijko Brkic Mariano Andujar

23 Juventus Roma 18 17 Lazio 14 Genoa Fiorentina 13 Inter Milan 13 12 12 Napoli Palermo 11 Sassuolo Sampdoria 11 Torino 10 Udinese 10 9 Chievo 8 Empoli AC Milan 8 6 6 **Atalanta** Parma 6 Verona Cagliari Napoli 6



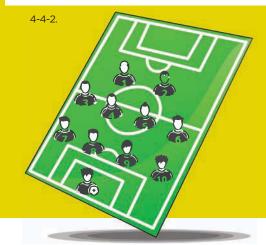
MOST CLEAN SHEETS

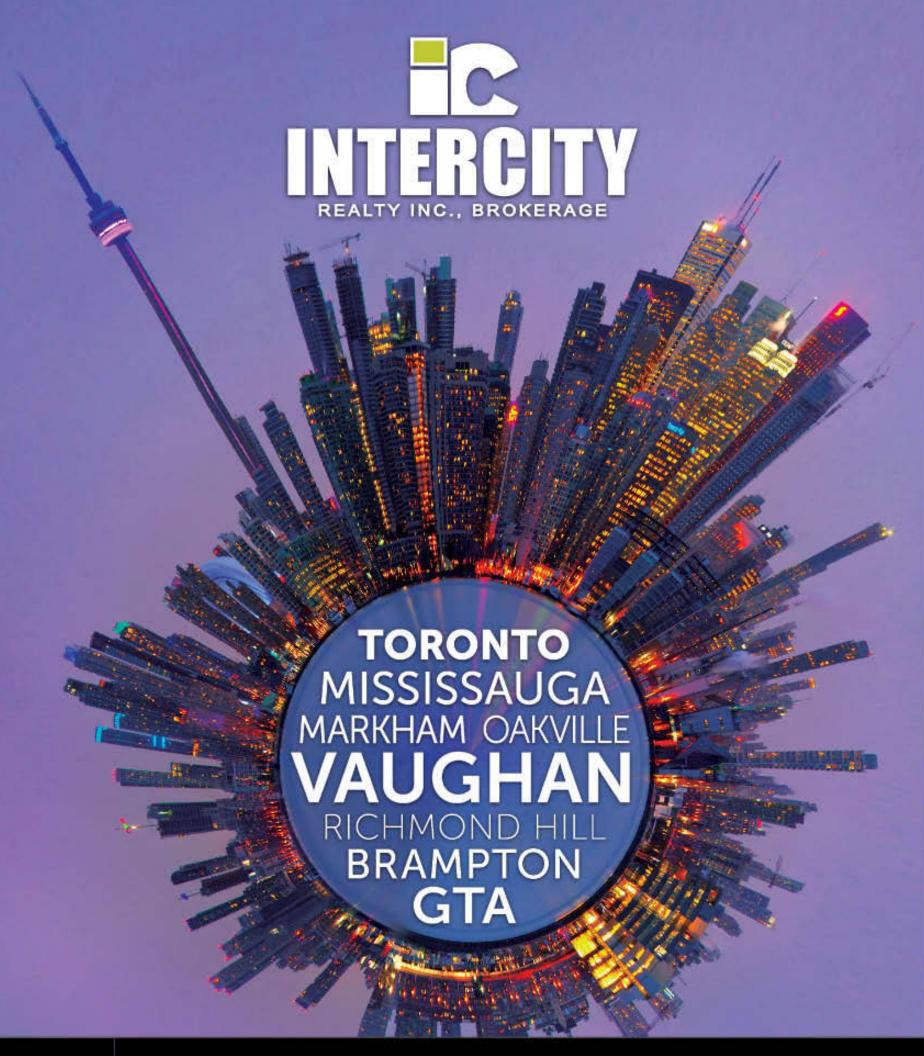
PLAYER Gianluigi Buffon Morgan Di Sanctis Albano Bizzarri Samir Handanovic Neto Federico Machetti Luigi Sepe Emiliano Viviano Andrea Consigli Marco Sportiello Antonio Mirante **Orestes Karnezis** Daniele Padelli Mattia Perin Stefano Sorrentino Rafael Cabral Diego Lopez Etrit Benisha

Rafael

Mariano Andujar

CS Juventus 18 Roma 16 Chievo 13 Inter Milan 11 Fiorentina 10 10 Lazio Empoli 10 Sampdoria 10 8 Sassuolo 8 Atalanta Parma 8 7 6 6 Udinese Torino Genoa Palermo 6 5 5 4 Napoli AC Milan Lazio Verona Napoli 4





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VE ON ONE

After winning the league and Copa Italia with Juventus this year, the French midfielder just missed out on a historic treble, losing the The Champions League final against Barcelona. He tells 360 how he is taking all the pressure in stride.

After such a successful season, how disappointing was that Champions League final defeat?

It was really disappointing; all the players were so desperate to win it. We could not have done anymore, we can be really proud of ourselves. We know that we gave it everything, but in the end Barcelona were just better than us.

Just how good were that Barcelona team?

They are amazing; we know that, everybody who knows football knows that. We took them back to 1-1, but when it matters they are always able to find that little bit more. That is what separates them from the rest of Europe.

You consoled a tearful Pirlo that broke down in tears at full time, how emotional was it? It was very emotional, Pirlo has won

everything, but he was so desperate to win the Champions League with Juventus. It would have been amazing for him and for the club, but it was not to be.

Now let's talk positive, you won the league by an incredible 17 points...

We are very proud of our domestic season. To win one of the major leagues in Europe by 17 points is almost unheard of. We were very strong this season in Italy, the truth is nobody got anywhere near us.

Personally you have had a great season has well haven't you?

I have been pleased with my season personally, I have become a better player, I have matured a lot. I am working hard, but when you get to learn off masters of the game like Pirlo it helps

Pirlo and other major stars have said you will go on to be the greatest midfielder in the world. Is that a lot of pressure?

If players like Pirlo and others like him are saying that, then it is a great honour. I do want to be the best midfield player in the world, so it is not a pressure it is an encouragement when one of the great players in history says something like that about you.

With your incredible form has come the inevitable stories linking you to Barcelona, PSG, and Chelsea...

That is not important. All I hear is that Pogba is going here or that Pogba is going there. The truth is nobody hears my private conversations with my agent, my family, and Juventus. In football there will always be stories.

Is there any player you look up to?

Like I say I have really learnt a lot off Pirlo, but also I watched a lot of Yaya Toure who plays a similar style to me. I think watching him really helped me to improve my game.

Do you feel the pressure of the French national team is on you as well?

No, I want to be a big part of it, but it is a team game and we have many good players.

And the ambition for next season?

To win trophies, I have won two this season and I am hungry for many more.









After arriving at Juventus, Pogba was given the nickname 'Il Polpo Paul' by fans of the Turin club, which translates into 'Paul the Octopus', as they said that his long legs reminded them of tentacles when he ran or

Pogba has had a variety of other nicknames throughout his career. At Manchester United he was nicknamed Nelson Mandela by his teammates, as he was one of few players willing to speak their mind in front of long-serving boss Sir Alex Ferguson, which ultimately ended his time at Old Trafford. 3. Paul isn't the only professional footballer in the family. His two older brothers also currently earn a wage playing football, although they aren't quite as successful as their younger sibling. Florentin Pogba currently plies his trade at Saint-Etienne in Ligue 1, while Mathias plays for League Two side Crawley Town.

The young Frenchman was just 3 months away from qualifying as English under the Premier League's Home Grown Player rules when he left Manchester United back in 2012, meaning he would take up a foreign player slot if he re-joined a Premier League side this summer.

At the age of just 22, Pogba is already setting European football alight. The youngster has already picked up 12 trophies, medals and awards - one for every 2 years of his life. His impressive haul includes 3 Serie A titles, an Under-20 World Cup and a Golden Boy award.

Pogba already has 16 years of experience under his belt, having started his football career at French side Roissy-en-Brie at the age of 6. It took just 8 years for the classy Frenchman to make the step up to a professional club, when he joined Ligue 2 side Le Havre.

Former Manchester United chief executive David Gill claimed that the club did everything within their financial power to tie Pogba down to the Premier League club, but failing to do so could prove even more costly, with Juventus demanding more than £80 million to lure him away from Italy.

Pogba's move to Juventus was controversial, as they were accused of tapping up the player, but it wasn't the first time the youngster had departed in such a fashion. His move from La Havre to Manchester United prompted a FA investigation, as it breached his contract with the French side.

Pogba's rise from a hot prospect to a worldclass talent was highlighted by his influential performances at the 2014 Brazil World Cup. The 22-year-old was duly awarded the Best Young Player award, beating Dutch wonderkid Memphis Depay and France team-mate Raphael Varane to claim the trophy.

While Juventus value Pogba in the region of £80 million, he is worth at least double. According to his agent, that is. Following Gareth Bale's £85 million Real Madrid switch, Mino Raiola, the man behind stars such as Ibrahimovic and Balotelli, claimed Pogba was worth at least €200 million.





The apple is ripe and we are ready to pick it," said Palermo President Maurizio Zamparini. "I think Juventus will keep him for the next three or four years and then sell him for €90m or €100m. He'll be comparable to Lionel Messi by then. Today, he is already a young Messi...

is about to cash-in or has already sold one of his prized assets. We'd heard it before when selling Javier Pastore to Paris Saint-Germain and then Edinson Cavani to Napoli. This time he was referring to Paulo Dybala. The 21-year-old had been strongly linked with the Old Lady following a highly impressive opening half of the 2014-15 season. After struggling to live up to expectations in his first two seasons at the Renzo Barbera, the forward was finally looking like not just a good player, but a very special one. Most of Europe's top clubs took an interest, many paid close attention and a number made offers to his outfit and himself. In the end, it was the Old Lady's cheque book which convinced the Rosanero and their lure that enticed the South

That was the rather unique

Zamparini in full car salesman mode,

as is often his comportment when he

"Juventus are the side who wanted me most," explained the attacker. "They made a real effort to sign me and that is why I am here. I was happy at Palermo, from day one, but I know that I have to do a lot more to play for Juve. I'm sure I can improve a great deal."

American.

The Bianconeri will certainly be expecting that to happen - especially when you consider how much they have invested in a player who has yet to fully deliver on his potential. Juve agreed to part with an initial €32m for the youngster, but that fee could rise by a further €8m if certain performances-related clauses are met. The pressure will certainly be on Dybala, but he's kind of been here before. In 2012, Palermo made Dybala their most expensive signing ever. Enchanted by the latest young Argentine forward to capture the imagination, they agreed to hand over €12m for a boy who had struck 17 goals in 38 games for Instituto de Cordoba. "He is the new Sergio Aguero," Zamparini declared at the time. "We beat Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain to his signature.'

Palermo came across Dybala almost by accident.

America, then sporting director Luca Cattani was laying the foundations to sign Franco Vasquez from Belgrano. During the trip, he also dined with Instituto chief Juan Carlos Barrera.

"He congratulated me on the signing of Vasquez, before telling me he had an even better player that I should look at," Cattani recalls. "A kid called Dybala. I watched him in four games, but the truth is that Zamparini had already made his mind up after just one."

Dybala was still 18 when Zamparini had given Cattani the green light to negotiate. By the end of that campaign, the kid had grabbed two hat-tricks and had become the youngest ever goalscorer for his outfit - dethroning Argentina's 1978 World Cup hero Mario Kempes in the process. Adjusting to Italian football, though, would prove difficult for the player. His settling in off the pitch was not facilitated by what was happening on it. The Sicilian outfit endured a disastrous campaign which ended in relegation, a term where Dybala contributed just three goals in 27 games. Statistically, things didn't improve much in Serie B seeing as he netted five in 28. But, towards the end of that promotion winning season, there were signs that Dybala and Italian football were finally on first name terms. His exploits in the campaign which has just finished confirmed as much. Juventus have the invoice to prove it. "When I came to Palermo, everyone was wondering if I was really worth €12m," Dybala stated. "They were saying it was a lot of money and that they'd paid too much for me. I've managed to silence the doubters, though. "Zamparini wasn't wrong to buy me, in spite of the criticism that came with my price-tag. He believed in me, he signed me when I was still in Argentina and he defended me from criticism over his deal

You learn more from the negative things. I knew it wasn't going to be easy playing in Serie B, but after overcoming some injury niggles I was able to find my feet and to start learning, a lot." So what have Juventus got themselves? Leaving potential to the future, Dybala is a versatile attacker who can play right across the forward line. He knows where the goal is, but he's much more than a goalscorer.

His balance, fantasy and trickery will give Juventus an effective dribbler which they have lacked in recent seasons. Truth be told, putting the Messi hyperbole to one side for a minute, he's been brought in as a 'replacement' for Carlos Tevez seeing as the latter will leave Turin either this summer or next.

It seems to be a case of one Argentine in and one Argentine out in Turin. Much to the frustration of Italy boss Antonio Conte. Although born in Laguna Larga, Dybala has the eligibility to play for Italy and Poland given his ancestry. Conte, struggling to find effective attacking solutions in his Azzurri attack, did take more than a passing glance at Dybala towards the end of last year. He didn't get very far.

"I THINK JUVENTUS **WILL KEEP** HIM FOR THE NEXT THREE OR **FOUR YEARS AND THEN SELL HIM** FOR €90M OR €100M. HE'LL BE COMPARABLE **TO LIONEL MESSI** BY THEN. TODAY, HE **IS ALREADY** A Young MESSI..."

IUVENTUS

"My ambition would be to wear the colours of Argentina," says Dybala. "Italy has a great tradition, but I was born in Argentina and I feel Argentine. When I was a kid, I dreamed of the Albiceleste."

Dybala's international ambitions will now be in the hands of Juventus and the latter's Champions League desire will be at the feet of Dybala. If those two aspirations are to successfully mix, then Zamparini's Dybala-Messi prophecy may have to be fulfilled one day. And that will be a tough ask...



















DYBALA AT A GLANCE

In Argentina he was nicknamed 'La Joya' – the jewel – and in Italy 'U Picciriddu', which is Palermo slang for 'The Kid'.

Dybala's grandfather Boleslaw was Polish, while his maternal grandmother was from Italy - hence why he was given Italian citizenship in 2012.

Paulo's first contract with Instituto saw him earn just €900 a month. Reports suggest he will net himself €2.5m a year in Turin. Former Palermo boss Gennaro Gattuso, who briefly coached him in Sicily, was instantly left impressed by the youngster. "He is a player who is two pages ahead of everyone else. He is pure class and you have to succeed when you have his touch and ability at this game. Paulo is a true player."

EUROPE'S ARGENTINE HITMEN

Lionel Messi (Barcelona)

The world's best player right now - perhaps the greatest ever. He may not be the inspiration he is for Barcelona when playing for his country, but Messi is an untouchable when it comes to the starting XI. Let's be honest, it's unlikely that Dybala will reach his unique levels.

Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)A fine finisher who left Atletico Madrid for Manchester City in 2011. Movement, agility and a keen eye for goal, the 27-year-old just keeps on improving. With over 25 goals for his country to date, Aguero is deadly on whatever stage he appears.

Carlos Tevez (Juventus)

Now in his 30s. Tevez has been around the block a few times but his move to Juventus in 2013 has reinvigorated his career. An inspiration in Turin, the forward was recalled to international duty in late 2014 by new boss Gerardo Martino.

Gonzalo Higuain (Napoli)

It feels like he's been around for ages, but Higuain is still only 27. As deadly as they come in the penalty area, he's never found goals hard to come by for River Plate, Real Madrid, Napoli or his country. Perhaps a little underrated.

Ezequiel Lavezzi (Paris SG)

A versatile attacking player who can be used out wide or in the middle. Lavezzi really came to the attention of the European game during five wonderful seasons with Napoli before a big money move to Paris SG. Has almost 40 caps for Argentina, but he rarely finds the net

Rodrigo Palacio (Inter)

Now 33, Palacio is coming towards the end of his career at the top level. After a promising start to his career at Boca, he struggled to live up to his potential until blooming late at Genoa and then Inter. His international career could well be over by now.

Mauro Icardi (Inter)

A 22-year-old centre-forward who Inter believe is a crucial part of their future. Having learnt his trade in the Barcelona youth system, Icardi underlined his potential in a short spell at Sampdoria. Definitely one to watch if he can curb his wild side.

Luciano Vietto (Villarreal)

A 21-year-old who was born in the same area as Paulo Dybala. Having started his professional career with Racing Club, Vietto moved to Villarreal last summer where he has quickly made an impression. An Under-20 international, Vietto has a full call-up in sight.

Franco Di Santo (Werder Bremen) Capped a handful of times by his country already, Di Santo is hoping for a recall after a disappointing spell in England with Chelsea, Blackburn and Wigan. Now more settled in Germany with Werder Bremen, he has started to ripple the net with regularity.





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ANATA

RESIDENT

Is this the end of an era for Silvio Berlusconi's Milan or a new chapter for a man who controlled the club for almost 30 years? Susy Campanale expects the latter.

END of an ERA







The Berlusconi's had a great trophy run in past years which featured some of the world's best players; Ibrahimovic, Pirlo. Shevchenko

Far Right (Opposite Page) Pippo Inzaghi is just the latest Milan Coach to feel the wrath of Silvio Berlusconi

Berlusconi **ERA**

Scudetti 8 '88, '92, '93, '94, '96, '99, '04, '11

Copa Italia

Champions League 5 '89, '90, '94, '03, '07

FIFA Club World Cup

am the most successful President in the history of club football." This is the boast Silvio Berlusconi often trots out whenever anyone questions his recent decisions, but the fact remains it is an assertion backed up by statistics. Milan were on the verge of bankruptcy in February 1986 when local businessman and media magnate Berlusconi swooped in to rescue the once-great side from disappearing off the map. In 29 years since, the Rossoneri have amassed eight Serie A titles, five European Cups, three Intercontinental Cups - the old name for the Club World Cup - six Italian Super Cups, five European Super Cups and a Coppa Italia. It's certainly not true to suggest the Rossoneri weren't a big club before Berlusconi arrived, but he did undoubtedly begin a new era. He was the first in Serie A to invest heavily in top stars, securing the Dutch trio of Marco van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Frank Rijkaard in the late 1980s, when Holland won the European Championship. It was his decision to hire then-unknown lowerleague tactician Arrigo Sacchi, who went on to transform the Italian and European approach to football. And he will never let you forget it. "In my 30 years guiding the club, we reached a great deal of success and Milan became something that reflects the image of Italy in the world. They told me once that in the Far East the three images that represented Italy were the Mafia, pizza and Sophia Loren. Lately things have changed and when people are asked about Italy, they think of the Mafia, pizza and Milan. I saw research that showed the Milan brand is very big in China and other Asian countries. We have circa 350 million fans around the world." This is why Berlusconi is seeking investors from

China and Thailand to help boost the club coffers, as Milan ended 2014 running at a loss of €91m. Failure to qualify for Europe for a second year running is unheard of in the Berlusconi era, but that is the situation they are in and the fans



are restless. Ultras ran a campaign begging for new partners, setting up a mock videogame with the slogan: 'Game over. Insert coin and Save AC Milan.'

When Berlusconi met with Thai businessman Bee Taechaubol in Milan and held an impromptu joint Press conference on the steps of his hotel, many expected this to be the end of an era. Calcio obituaries were already written up and set to go online when he made a surprising comment. "I can keep at least 51 per cent."

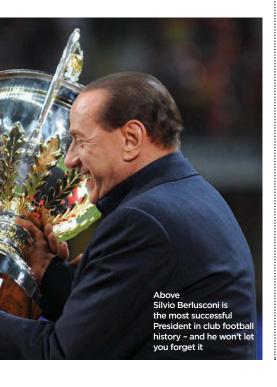
Had he got cold feet over selling his 'baby'? The feet got colder, as within a couple of weeks Silvio had increased his minimum stake to 75 per cent and entered negotiations with Chinese Head of State Xi Jinping. They had already become friends during Berlusconi's time as Prime Minister of Italy, though since then Xi has ascended to the role of 'Paramount Leader' of China.

"It is important for me to point out that I have no desire, intention or need to sell Milan. It is my duty to find new funds for the club in this new era when a single family cannot really compete with the oil money flooding into the sport. I am pleased that all interested parties insist I remain involved. Evidently they tie the Milan brand intrinsically with my persona. Well, it couldn't be otherwise, considering all my family has done for Milan over the years."

Silvio never tried very hard to shake off rumours he dictated the line-up to Coaches like Carlo Ancelotti, Max Allegri and Pippo Inzaghi. Openly criticising his tacticians after defeats, flying in by helicopter every Friday to fire up the team, Berlusconi always liked to give off the impression he'd sit on the bench if only he had time. He was regularly in the stands during successful periods, taking credit for good results, and was notably absent during negative streaks.

"In football there are highs and lows, moments that are more favourable or less," said the patron as the Rossoneri finished their worst season for decades. "Unfortunately in recent years I was unable to dedicate the time to Milan that it deserved." Of course, his absence was the reason for the setbacks, his presence the key to renewed success. Any criticism from fans is 'ungrateful' for making this the most successful club in the world. It's safe to say Berlusconi has an impressive ego and the idea of selling the club at its lowest ebb clearly irked him. Reports suggest he could well have sold a majority share of Milan if they had at least qualified for the Europa League, but to go now would seem like admitting defeat. That is something Berlusconi has never done in his sporting, business or political careers and he's not going to start now.

Besides, rather than the end of an era, it could be the beginning of a new chapter. The Casa Milan complex opened last year and plans are well underway to build their own stadium. Situated in the Portello area of the city, it would seat 48,000 with the pitch covered by a retractable roof. The complex includes a hotel, restaurant and a school for members of the youth academy. We've seen how the purpose-built arena boosted Juventus revenue streams and the Rossoneri hope to follow suit, hot on the heels of Roma. It looks like we haven't seen the back of Berlusconi yet.



MEAN BOY

knows the power of a cutting quip. He has often employed jibes to sound the death knell for increasingly unpopular Coaches, icing them down to size in a public arena. Fans have become all too familiar with the routine and know the inevitable ending. Winning Serie A and Champions League trophies was never enough to stop the President acting as if he knew far more about football than them. Just ask Alberto Zaccheroni, who after securing the 1999 Scudetto was described as being "a distracted tailor who ruined good cloth." Even Carlo Ancelotti was torn down in the cruellest way in May 2009. "We lost the Scudetto and it was all his fault. We have excellent players in possession and should've sed our style on that, but instead we did the opposite." The list goes on. Leonardo was called "stubborn," Max Allegri "doesn't understand anything about football" and larence Seedorf was "incapable of keeping the locker room in check."

Berlusconi's most famous scalp was not even at Milan. After Italy lost the Euro 2000 Final on a Golden Goal, having been just seconds from victory until a last-gasp Sylvain Wiltord equaliser, the then Prime Minister told reporters "Dino Zoff was disgraceful. He acted like the worst amateur by refusing to man-mark Zinedine Zidane." Zoff resigned his post. "I refuse to take lessons in dignity from Mr Berlusconi."

DIAVOLO'S HELLISH CAMPAIGN

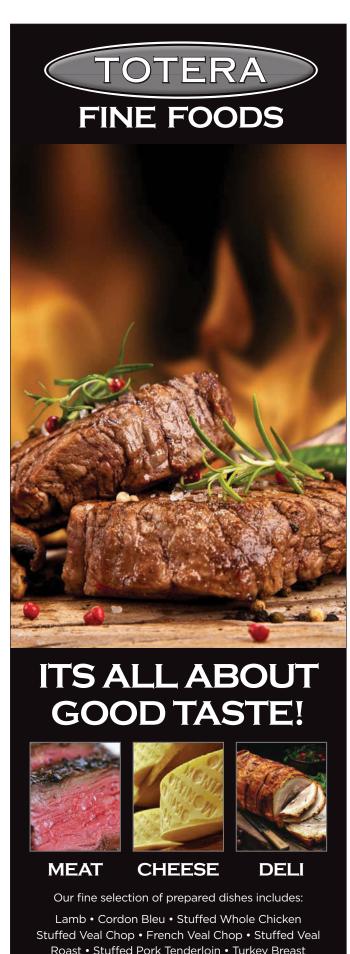
Pippo Inzaghi ended up overseeing the worst season of the Silvio Berlusconi era. It's all in the statistics, as the previous lowest finish was 11th in 1996-97. At least then they had the excuse of going through two Coaches, sacking Oscar Washington Tabarez after 11 rounds and bringing back Arrigo Sacchi. That traumatic campaign saw them crash out of the Champions League group phase to Porto and Rosenborg, then legends Franco Baresi and Mauro Tassotti – now assistant manager to Inzaghi – retired.

The 2014-15 season, however, set new negative records. The Rossoneri had never picked up so few points in a Serie A campaign with 20 teams, a tournament format they took part in 16 times. Milan have the worst disciplinary record in all of the top five European Leagues this season, as their players were shown the red card on 12 different occasions.

When it comes to the defence, calcio historians have to go all the way back to 1948-49 for the last time they conceded over 50 goals. Never mind the low point of the Berlusconi years, this campaign will go down as one of the club's worst ever.

The situation truly precipitated after the Christmas break, scraping only 21 points from 20 games played in 2015. That's an average of around one point per game, the kind of results that usually get a side relegated.





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"AFTER HIS CAREER IS OVER, HE **WILL HAVE A HUGE ROLE** ROMA AND I'M **SURE HE'LL BE PART OF** ROMA FOR **REST OF HIS**

- Roma President James Pallotta on the future of Francesco Totti



FROSINONE CALCIO

SERIE A DEBUTANTS

There will be two completely new faces in Serie A next season, as Carpi and Frosinone earned their first promotions. Carpi is a province of Modena, so will have a local derby with Sassuolo in 2015-16, while Frosinone are from the Lazio region with 46,000



PIRLO RECORD

Andrea Pirlo picked up his fifth consecutive Serie A winners' medal. He is the 21st player to achieve this five-year streak, but the first to do so with two different clubs (Milan and Juventus).



NEW HEIGHTS, NEW DIGS?Italian outfit Carpi F.C. 1909 has been promoted to Serie A for the first time, an achievement that brings joyous celebrations to the team's fans in the province of Modena. The problem is, not many of those fans can see Carpi play in each game. This new Serie A side doesn't exactly have the most spacious stadium. The Stadio Sandro Cabassi holds, well...4144 people. That's right. Four thousand. Yikes!



FOUR TIMES SCORNED

It's no secret that Italian forward Antonio Cassano is a bit of a character. Such that he cannot stay at a club longer than a year and change, Cassano was linked, for a fourth time, with Juventus but rather than simply denying the rumour, he busted out a vulgar one-liner. While the quote itself is NSFW, the gist of it is that while Cassano believes Juventus is attractive to some, it just doesn't do it for him... and we'll leave it at that!

DID YOU KNO

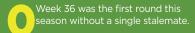
Week 35 was the first since Serie A went to 20 teams in 2004-05 that saw every side find the net.

Torino ended a two-decade Derby della Mole drought, beating Juventus 2-1. Since April 1995 they managed only four draws and 13 defeats - including seven losses on the bounce.

DI NATALE BEATS BAGGIO Antonio Di Natale is considering whether to

stay at Udinese or go abroad after beating Roberto Baggio's career total of 205 Serie A goals. The Divine Ponytail sent a message of congratulations.







FROZEN IN TIME

It seems like Gianluigi Buffon has been around forever, and that reign between the posts isn't ending any time soon: Buffon has committed to three more seasons with Juventus, which should see him continue playing until the ripe old (well, footballing old) age of 40!

SHOW SOME (DIS)RESPECT!

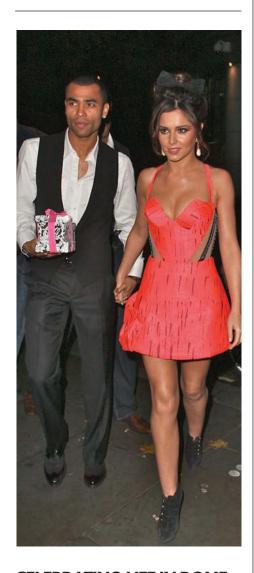
iorentina has sacked manager Vincenzo Montella after it was revealed that Montella had problems with a clause in his contract. In response, Fiorentina showed him the axe, and said, in a statement, "We would have expected to see the coach behave in a clearer, more respectful and less ambiguous manner towards the club and the fans that have given him so much.'





BOOK YOUR TICKET

Italy's Euro 2016 qualifier with Norway will be hosted by the Stadio Olimpico in Rome on October 13. It will be the first game played at the Olimpico since a friendly against Argentina on August 14 2013. Rome has been the setting for 57 official Nazionale matches, seeing 33 wins, 17 draws and only seven losses. The Azzurri's other upcoming home ties will be at the Stadio Artemio Franchi in Florence against Malta on September 3 and the Stadio Renzo Barbera in Palermo against Bulgaria on September 6.



CELEBRATING LIFE IN ROME

To say Ashley Cole is enjoying his time in Rome might just be an understatement; the former Chelsea fullback dropped £20,000 on multiple bottles of champagne, spotted during a pool party at the Sintillate resort. Roma finished second this season, 17 points behind Juventus.



BY THE NUMBERS

Claudio Marchisio netted his 32nd top flight goal against Inter in Week 36, but it was his first penalty.



YEARNING FOR HOME

Manchester United attacking midfielder Ravel Morrison signed a pre-contract with Lazio back in January, but that deal doesn't look like it's going to happen after all. Morrison is looking to get out of the contract, citing homesickness as his reason. All this, before he has even played a game in Serie A! QPR is rumoured to be interested in his services, providing him an out before even getting started with Lazio.

DID YOU KNOW?

Luca Toni scored at least 20 goals for the sixth season of his career between Serie A and the Bundesliga.

Udinese finally received their first penalty of the season after 35 rounds and 12 months. Before the award against Sampdoria on May 10, their last spot-kick was with Livorno on May 4, 2014.

"IT WILL BE OUR MODERN DAY COLOSSEUM, ROMA WILL HAVE A STADIUM THAT REPRESENTS THE CITY ACROSS THE WORLD, JUST AS OUR HISTORY DESERVES"

- Totti brags about the new €1.1 billion Roma Stadium . The project is one of the biggest Italian football has ever seen.

DID YOU KNOW?

Juventus remain unbeaten on home turf for the second consecutive Serie A campaign, something the club hadn't achieved since 1973-75.

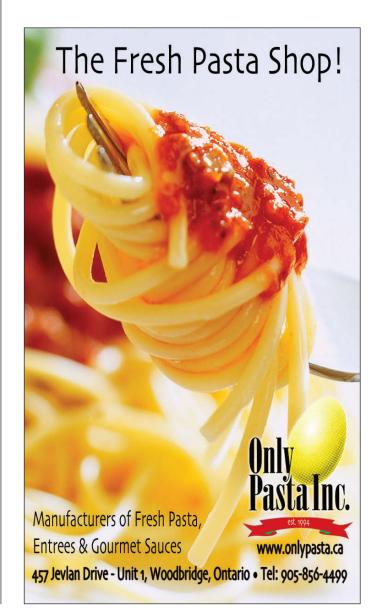
Lazio defender Santiago Gentiletti scored on his comeback against Sampdoria, 237 days after knee ligament surgery. Curiously, his injury was sustained in the same stadium when facing Genoa at the Stadio Ferraris



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SAN SIRO CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Juventus, Roma and Lazio now know the date of any potential San Siro Champions League final, with May 28 the official date. Next year's showpiece event will be held at Stadio Giuseppe Meazza, with the three Italian sides looking to make a final on home turf. Juventus, of course, made it to this year's final, losing 3-1 to Barcelona in Berlin, while Roma will be seeking to better last year's group stage exit. Lazio will compete in the competition for the first time in eight years, and will play the first leg of their qualifier on 18 or 19 July, with the return leg a week later. The draw will be made on August 7. The group stage, which will feature both Juventus and Roma, will get underway on September 15. Due to a change in the rules. Juventus will be top seeds as Serie A champions, and therefore cannot meet Barcelona, Chelsea, Bayern Munich, Paris Saint-Germain, Benfica, Zenit St Petersburg or PSV Eindhoven.



MILAN ON ICE

Milan players are to stand in a cryogenic chamber at -30C for 30 seconds, then two minutes at -160C. "It can halve the recovery time from muscular lesions, strains, contusions and lumbago.



MALDINI IN MIAMI

Milan legend Paolo Maldini and entrepreneur Riccardo Silva are behind the newest NASL franchise, Miami FC, set to debut in 2016.

LEAGUES REVAMPED

Plans are in motion to reduce Serie A and B to 18 teams within three years. The top flight currently has 20 sides, while Serie B has 22, but should be cut down by 2018-19.

Sassuolo have hosted Milan twice in the top flight and Domenico Berardi scored seven goals. The 20-year-old netted an extraordinary four in the 4-3 victory last season, then a hat-trick this term.

Milan received 13 red cards in the opening 37 rounds, the worst disciplinary record in Europe's top five leagues.







NEW ERA IN MILAN

A.C. Milan president and former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has had a hold on the club for quite some time, but, as Milan look to bolster its ranks with the likes of Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Jackson Martinez, so, too, does the team's executive structure. Berlusconi is selling 48 percent of his shares to Thai investor Bee Taechaubol for a whopping \$530 million!

BY THE NUMBERS

omenico Berardi is the first player er to put two Serie A hat-tricks past

Mattia De Sciglio received the fastest ever Serie A red card, just 43 seconds into Napoli-Milan. This beats Luis Oliveira's dismissal to seconds into Reggina 1-1 Cagliari in December 1000

COSTLY CHANT

A court ordered Juventus to pay €3,000 compensation to a Napoli fan offended by crowd chants during a game in November 2013.

THROWING SHADES

Alvaro Morata celebrated the Juventus winner at San Siro by posing with a pair of sunglasses, but the 27-year-old Inter fan who flung them was "agitated and they flew out of my hand. Afterwards Morata threw them to the side of the pitch and I haven't seen them since. Fortunately I only paid €2 for them."

THE MOST LOYAL FAN

A 14-year-old boy went out with his friends and took a dip in a nearby canal. Unfortunately, tragedy struck, as the boy ended up hurt and trapped underwater for over 40 minutes and was rushed to hospital, where he lay in a coma. After four weeks, the boy woke up, and the first thing he did was ask whether his favourite team. Juventus, was still in the Champions League, just days before the final!



DE ROSSI ABROAD

"I am a person who likes to travel, so I would've enjoyed an experience abroad and was close to that at some moments in my career," confessed Daniele De Rossi. "I chose Roma and I'm happy with that."

Cristobal Jorquera has three Serie A strikes and two of them were against



SAPUTO ALL SMILES

Montreal Impact owner Joey Saputo is all smiles as his Italian club, Bologna, returns to Serie A! A successful season in the second division sees Saputo's team promoted back to Serie A and ready to compete with Italy's best. With a 1-1 draw against Pescara, Bologna secured its promotion: Saputo now has work on his hands.

DID YOU KNOW?

Dries Mertens bagged Serie A braces precisely one year apart, against Verona on May 18, 2014 and with Cesena on May 18, 2015

Gregoire Defrel is the only foreign player in Cesena's entire history to bag an away brace. He did it twice and both games ended in defeat.

Lazio had two players sent off against Inter on May 10, something the club hadn't experienced since a 2-0 loss at Fiorentina in October 2012.

Milan have only won away to Napoli once in the last 15 years, 2-1 in 2010, along with four draws and four losses.



BLAME ZEMAN

Cagliari defender Luca Rossettini blames Zdenek Zeman for relegation. "We had warning signs in pre-season. The fitness work we did was frightening. I'd never seen anything like it."

BY THE NUMBERS

Genoa were the first side to score at least five goals on two different occasions this season.

For the eighth time in 35 seasons, Genoa finish above Sampdoria.

BY THE NUMBERS

Mauro Icardi has scored in each of his five League meetings with Juve for a total six goals.



NO GOLD, NO THANK YOU

Juventus forward Alvaro Morata may have scored in the Champions League final against Barcelona, but the Spanish striker isn't pleased with a second-place finish in the end. In fact, he says he doesn't even want to remember the day, saying, "At the end, I didn't swap shirts with anyone. I don't want any memory of that day. I didn't even take the medal. I don't have silver medals at home."



KHEDIRA TO JUVE

Sami Khedira said Juventus "will have its say in Europe and I want to be part of that," as he didn't leave Real Madrid for money. The midfielder was a free agent after his contract at the Bernabeu expired, turning down offers from England and Germany to join Juve. "It hurts when people say I left Real Madrid because of money," he told Welt am Sonntag in Germany. "I did not behave badly. Real Madrid presented me with an impressive contract and at the end of the day I could've still won a lot there. "My decision to leave Real Madrid had nothing to do with money. I told my agent that I wanted a change, as I was tired, even though they were five fantastic years. "After the World Cup I felt completely exhausted, above all mentally. Now I am back in shape and want to continue enjoying my football. "Juve are a fantastic club with a great tradition, a wonderful present and a promising future. "I am certain Juventus will have its say in Europe in future and I want to be part of that."



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At one point riddled with infighting, politics and the betrayal of a philosophy, Barcelona moved to a position of strength via the shortest route possible - consistency. Jeremy Lim analyses their triumphant title charge.



BARCELONA NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

43

22

In the end, a superior team dynamic had been what catapulted the club to glory

Right Although his methods were initially met with suspicion, Luis Enrique soon proved his mettle. guiding Barcelona to finish the season with a stunning 94 points

t came at last for Barcelona. There it was, t came at last for Barcelona. There is now, something new, in a season that already had everything. They had gone from plunging depths to dizzying heights, produced magnificent hat-tricks and endured 'gastroenteritis', training ground bust-ups and boardroom battles. Then, at the end, they celebrated the Primera Liga title returning to Camp Nou. And there it was nevertheless, in a campaign that already had everything. Well, almost everything anyway. On the same day in May that Luis Suarez fired in his maiden hat-trick in Blaugrana colours, Cordoba the hapless victims in an 8-0 thrashing, Andres Iniesta notched his first assist of the season. Only nine months after the campaign had gotten underway, and over a year since his last in La Liga; the contrast had never been sharper, the onus of deciding games moved higher and higher up the pitch.

"We have to stamp our personality on games because we're Barca," Suarez said, conscious of his role in the transformation. The summer arrival combined with the reborn Lionel Messi and Neymar for the mesmerising total of 81 goals between themselves - Gerard Pique acknowledging the 'special relationship' existing between the 'best players' in the world - as the club streaked off to lift the title.

"The club came from finishing trophy-less when I took over. We achieved great numbers and a great level during the whole year. This victory demonstrates what we have done during the whole season," lauded Coach Luis Enrique. This will be remembered as the title that broke Barcelona's rut and, hopefully, begins a run. It will also be remembered as the one that signalled a permanent shift in mentality, a new way of winning. A fearsome frontline was entrusted with resolving matches on its own. "We have three monsters upfront," Iniesta stated, and with them Barcelona never appeared more than a single pass away from gobbling up their opponents. Yet it would be unfair to say that the Catalans'

Pedro 6 Ivan Rakitic **TOP ASSISTS** Lionel Messi 18 Luis Suárez 14 8 Neymar Ivan Rakitic **GOALS GOALS FOR AGAINST** 110

Lionel Messi

Luis Suárez

Neymar

THIS YEAR

Record: 30-4-4 Home: 15-4-0 Away: 11-5-3 1st Finish:

LAST YEAR

Record: 27-6-5 Home: 16-2-1 11-4-4 Awav: Finish: 2nd



ascension was just down to them having the best attack in Spain, because they also had the best defence. Enrique was at the helm of a side that kept 23 clean sheets and conceded only 21 goals in the process. He took away their weaknesses at set-pieces, guiding them to a total of 94 points seven more than Pep Guardiola achieved during the fabled Treble haul of 2009 - the former winger himself left with the best record of any Barca boss after 50 games in charge. Statistically speaking, Enrique's task appeared easy by the end. Then again, it had been anything but. The way Barca shifted focus to transitioning from back to front at lightning speed raised eyebrows about identity, even if the talent residing at the front had permitted, almost necessitated, it. "The style is always the same. I've never seen a Barca without control of the game," defended Pique.

Still the sensation that Barcelona's middle three were being called upon to produce fewer and fewer moments of significance remained, overshadowed by the awesome MSN triumvirate of Messi, Suarez and Neymar. It was one thing for Enrique to come to Camp Nou and change the way history and tradition demanded they play, through the midfield. It had been another entirely to change that and not bring immediate results It wasn't just that Barcelona lost to Real Madrid in the first Clasico of the season. It was that Barca had lost to Madrid, and Celta, and Real Sociedad by January.

"If you do poorly, they kick you out. If you're normal or good, you're criticised," Enrique bemoaned. Blame certainly seemed easier to come by than points in the new year. Succumbing at Sociedad did not just keep them off the top of the table, it stretched them to a sort of breaking point. Messi's absence in Anoeta exposed the team's dependence on him. But then Barcelona had been exposed everywhere, in the boardroom and on the training ground, afterwards.

Sporting director Andoni Zubizarreta was removed after the farce and his assistant Carles Puyol soon walked away. Undermined from all angles, Enrique sought a way out. But not out of the club, as the majority of the club faithful had hoped then. Out of the crisis. "Victories are the only things that can calm this wave," the newcomer said. Win, and the fans would be won over. If there was a way, it would be Messi's way. A feud between the Asturian Coach and Argentine star had been just a passing moment in the latter's remarkable campaign. New levels of motivation along with a new diet brought back his hunger for goals and success. He would become decisive once again, finishing the season having scored 43 times and assisted an incredible 21 in total. "Last year I had an uneven season, but this year I started differently and now I feel great," Messi cited.

Shifted to the right where he could be central again, La Pulga was the catalyst for Barcelona to begin again. "Messi has evolved to become a complete player. Not just a goalscorer, he has also become a midfielder, an assister. Now, Messi can control the game more because he has Suarez and Neymar," said Javier Mascherano, attempting to define his compatriot's contributions. Mostly, Barcelona just enjoyed them.

It was key that Enrique had the will to implement his ideas. More crucial that he had the players to do so too. Suarez was a star in every way but name, one who came in and described his role as 'helping Messi and Neymar play their best game'. No petty rivalries and 'no jealousy' marred a perfect partnership, as Pique, himself back to his buccaneering best, put it. But soon the Uruguayan grew out of his cocoon, becoming a habitual contributor. Just like the rest of the new arrivals had. Suarez scored the winner in the reverse Clasico fixture. Jeremy Mathieu, the much-maligned summer signing, headed in the opener.

Few watching from the Camp Nou stands

joined in with Enrique describing themselves as 'gratified', after seeing Barcelona score against Real Madrid from a set-piece and then a hopeful punt upfield. But true beauty lay in victory for the trainer. "You have to have [different] resources. Our aim is to have the ball, create chances and defend a long way from our goal," Enrique

The veterans learnt and contributed too, Iniesta sacrificing and adapting to a reduced role, Xavi not so much functioning as the continuous link between midfield and attack as he was the link between the Coach and Messi. "Not only does the team score, but they are all so supportive that they help with the defensive work," finished Enrique. "All are playing at an extraordinary level." The effectiveness with which his team killed games just as they had controlled them previously was magnificent, something he has rarely been sufficiently celebrated for. "I think every Coach has different ideas. So does our Coach, but right now I want to give him thanks from our team because without him, this would be impossible." Ivan Rakitic said. Unlike his club predecessor the year before, the new No 4 had not disappeared in the homecoming stretch of the season.

Neither, it turned out, did Barcelona's title charge They took giant steps forward with their Clasico victory, but their main rivals certainly hadn't lost it until the last, manic weeks. "Madrid fought hard and made life difficult for us, but they collapsed mentally in the final games while we only got better," Mathieu maintained.

Overall, Barca were fitter, more determined. They surged to the end with 18 wins in 20 matches, clinching their 23rd title in the penultimate week. Six of the starting XI that surrendered the League to Atletico Madrid in 2014 went out at the Vicente Calderon and won it back, 364 days later. "They gave us up for dead and we have had a magnificent season," celebrated Jordi Alba. The champions may not have come through unscathed, but there is a clear feeling they prevailed nevertheless. From the ridiculous to the sublime, Barcelona showed no sign of letting up in the race for the League. "We believed at difficult moments, we overcame adversity. We laughed when we had to laugh and suffered when we had to suffer," concluded Mascherano, the side that apparently began the year with the biggest weaknesses left without any by the end. "That just makes this more special," smiled Enrique.

LUCHO LINES UP TO WIN LA LIGA

Barcelona had not given the impression of a wildly with line-ups, his caustic responses to the Press quite the barb, the 45-year-old initially inspired little confidence in his ability Yet Enrique had been building for Barcelona's moment. Infighting at the start of 2015 threatened to derail their season, but by-andlarge the Coach kept concentration levels high had benefited from the early rotation, ready to roar in the decisive stages of the campaign; the fitness groundwork laid by staff members in staving off the widespread injuries that plagued the squad last term. Of the type only to change on his own a more direct, winning brand of football had been a major driving force on the road to the title. His resolve went to show that both schools of thought could evolve into something special, instead of diminishing the other. The Coach's ability to get the most from Lionel Messi likewise proved that opposites don't just attract, they enhance, providing Against the odds, and despite still not receiving the security in his post his achievements deserve, Enrique succeeded in eading Barcelona to victory when many other lesser men might have faltered.

"WE HAVE THE **SOUAD THAT WE WANT TO** HAVE, IT IS A **SOUAD FOR** TOMORROW. **FOR NEXT SEASON AND** ALSO A SOUAD WITH BIG **POSSIBILITIES FOR THE NEXT FIVE OR TEN** YEARS."

Above

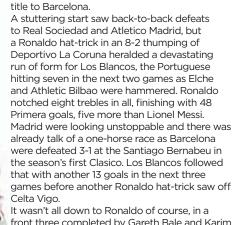
The image of the new Barcelona, the terrific trio, led by Lionel Messi, took them on a romp to an impressive League

Xavi had a very succesful season durint his last year with the club.

Barcelona are outstanding Spanish champions, effectively clinching the title with two matches to spare. Mike Barnes reflects on the Catalans' three closest rivals -Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid and Valencia - finishing comfortably

Right Goal machine Cristiano Ronaldo had a prolific season, scoring eight hat-tricks, but failed to deliver another Spanish





season that promised so much delivered

Los Blancos' record 22-game winning run ended at Valencia in January, signalling a period of inconsistency that ultimately handed the Primera

Anothing for Carlo Ancelotti's Real Madrid

and ultimately cost the veteran Italian his job.

front three completed by Gareth Bale and Karim Benzema, but the former Manchester United star was always the centre of attention. Scoring goals for fun and rewriting the record books, the Portuguese dominated proceedings while the Welshman was often seen as peripheral, drifting in and out of games.

An end to the winning run at Mestalla signalled a return to inconsistency. Madrid conceded a double to rivals Atletico, who thumped them 4-0 at the Vicente Calderon before Barcelona, by now back on top of La Liga, exacted revenge in the Clasico at Camp Nou. That defeat prompted talk of Ancelotti's departure, but his players responded in the best possible way, crushing Granada 9-1 with Ronaldo netting five times. Iker Casillas regained his position as first-choice between the posts at the start of the season, but the 34-year-old goalkeeper had an up and down campaign and was jeered by the fans who have $% \left\{ 1,2,...,n\right\}$ always adored him, amidst rumours that his time could finally be up, with club said to be lining up a bid for Manchester United's David de Gea Finally, Madrid's hopes of defending the Champions League were shredded by Juventus, an out of sorts Bale shouldering a hefty share of the blame, and Barcelona were crowned Champions with a game to spare. Ancelotti's men racked up 118 Primera goals, eight more than the champions, and finished just two points behind Barcelona. A close finish always seemed likely, but in the end, five away defeats proved far too many.



emirates

MATRIT NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

48
15
13
13
7

TOP ASSISTS

Cristiano Ronaldo	16
James Rodríguez	13
Karim Benzema	10
Isco	9
Gareth Bale	9

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

118

38

THIS YEAR

Record:	30-2-6
Home:	16-2-1
Away:	14-0-5
Finish:	2nd

LAST YEAR

27-6-5 Record: Home: 16-1-2 11-5-3 Away: Finish: 3rd





ATLETICO MADRID: SIMEONE'S MEN ARE THE BEST OF THE REST AGAIN



ATHLETICO MADRID **NUMBERS**

TOP GOAL SCORER

Antoine Griezmann Mario Mandzukic 5 Tiago Raúl García 5 Saúl Ñíguez 4

TOP ASSISTS

Koke 10 Gabi Mario Mandzukic 5 Tiago 4 Juanfran

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

67

29

THIS YEAR

Record: 23-9-6 14-3-2 Home: 9-6-4 Awav: Finish:

LAST YEAR

Record: 28-6-4 15-4-0 Home: 13-2-4 Away: 1st Left French striker Antoine Griezmann was a revelation at the Vicente Calderon following his summer arrival from Real Sociedad.

"NEITHER MARIO MANDZUKIC NOR THE RETURNING **FERNANDO TORRES** COULD PROVIDE THE NECESSARY **FIREPOWER TO REPLICATE** DIECO COSTA'S IN FRONT OF GOAL."

Spanish title winners and Champions League Trunners-up in 2014, Diego Simeone's Atletico Madrid never seriously looked to break the stranglehold of Barcelona and Real Madrid in the top two places this time around, but it was another impressive season under the charismatic Argentine.

Having lost arguably their best players, with Diego Costa, Thibaut Courtois and Filipe Luis all leaving the Vicente Calderon last summer, Simeone needed to rebuild his squad. To his credit, he did so while retaining the intense rather than spectacular approach that had previously served so well.

Neither Mario Mandzukic nor the returning Fernando Torres could provide the necessary firepower to replicate Costa's prowess in front of goal. Mandzukic managed 12 goals but Torres found the net just four times in 19 appearances. Miguel Angel Moya and Jan Oblak both made sterling efforts to fill Courtois' ample shoes between the posts, whilst it was the combined creativity and marksmanship of Antoine Griezmann that made the greatest impact. The French international signed from Real Sociedad struck 22 goals in La Liga and was comfortably Atletico's best player throughout the campaign. Although they fell well short, 14 points behind their city neighbours, Atletico held on to third place for the majority of the campaign and had some notable successes along the way. A double over their illustrious rivals - a 2-1 win at the Santiago Bernabeu and a thumping 4-0 triumph at the Vicente Calderon - was an undoubted hiahliaht.

Despite that Primera double. Simeone's men were unable to avenge the loss inflicted by Los Blancos in the 2014 Champions League Final, though there was a certain inevitability in the quarter-final draw throwing up another two encounters between the capital clubs. With battling midfielders like Tiago, Koke and Arda Turan, Atleti are the past masters of the cagey, stifling game, but they were finally outwitted by Ancelotti's side.

Defeats at Real Sociedad and Celta Vigo and at home to Villarreal dented their hopes, but although they only sustained six losses - as few as Real Madrid - the points dropped in nine draws proved crucial. Atletico were as defensively solid as ever, thanks to men like Diego Godin, Joao Miranda, Juanfran Torres and Gabi, and only Barcelona conceded fewer goals, but a lack of potency in front of goal proved their undoing. Valencia and Sevilla both scored more goals than Atleti whilst, incredibly, Simeone's side were on target 51 times fewer than Real Madrid.



VALENCIA: NUNO'S YOUNG GUNS ARE ON THE UP



"THIS TEAM IS CONTINUING TO GROW AND **IS GETTING BETTER GAME** BY GAME"



Champions League



to third place, the experienced manager offered an insight into what was to come - tactical

Moyes.

flexibility, players fielded in unfamiliar roles and unconventional decisions. De Oranje went 3-5-2 in Brazil, not the traditional Dutch 4-3-3, Dirk Kuyt was used as a right-wing-back and Tim Krul was brought off the bench for the quarterfinal penalty shootout with Costa Rica, raising eyebrows from Amsterdam to Manchester. Similarly, after he took over at Old Trafford, Van Gaal vacillated between three at the back and four, used Ashley Young as a left-sided defender and more than once preferred rookie James Wilson to on-loan Radamel Falcao. But after United struggled with three defenders, Van Gaal's decision to return to four worked out, Young proved to be one of United's better players of the season and Falcao showed nothing to suggest he was a better option than the youngster Wilson. Van Gaal was, on the whole, and despite some

following a misspent nine months under David

Van Gaal's appointment was confirmed prior to the World Cup and in guiding the Netherlands

A return to the Champions League was the objective, and it was achieved with time to spare. Van Gaal had to mix, match and makedo at times, unable to get a consistent XI on the pitch as his defence was decimated and midfield mauled by injury. Falcao was neither use nor ornament and Robin van Persie struggled for form and fitness, leaving captain Wayne Rooney shouldering the burden in attack - and sometimes midfield.

rocky patches, proven right.

Rooney occasionally deputised for Michael Carrick and United looked a different team when the former Tottenham Hotspur playmaker was available to knit things together in his calm, technical manner, with Ander Herrera showing signs he could be Carrick's long-term successor. Marouane Fellaini definitely won't be but Van Gaal got more out of the Belgium international than his predecessor - ironic considering Fellaini thrived at Everton under Moyes.

Although Van Gaal answered many of the questions around the United side as the season went on, some issues lingered on unresolved. David De Gea looked increasingly bound for Real Madrid as speculation persisted and no new contract was signed, and record signing Angel di Maria had a difficult time on and off the pitch. Memphis Depay's arrival was at least confirmed before the season's end as Van Gaal's recovery mission continued apace

VALENCIA NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Daniel Pareio Paco Alcacer 11 Pablo Piatti Nicolás Otamendi 6 Sofiane Feghouli 6

TOP ASSISTS

José Gavá 6 Pablo Piatti 6 Sofiane Feghouli **Daniel Parejo** Paco Alcacer

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

70

32

THIS YEAR

Record: 22-11-5 Home: 15-3-1 Away: 7-8-4 4th Finish:

LAST YEAR

Record: 13-10-15 Home: 10-3-6 3-7-9 Awav: 8th Finish:







Exclusive live coverage of La Liga, Ligue 1, Serie A and more. Visit www.beINSPORTS.tv for listings and schedules.

Edo Dalmonte picks out the winners and losers from another scintillating season in Spain's Primera Division.

Unai Emery's side broke a number of club records, including points earned over a season, and topped it off with Champions League qualification after managing to retain the Europa League

Right Athletic endured a difficult first half to the season, but turned it around to storm into

Belov

Scottish manager David Moyes was brought in midway through a tough term for Real Sociedad, but managed to steady the ship





















SEVILLA: SINGING ALL THE WAY

A Europa League final and a 13 point improvement are no mean feat for a club with €80m debt and without Ivan Rakitic, Alberto Moreno and Fabio Fazio. Unai Emery's outstanding coaching and bargain recruits - Carlos Bacca's 34 League goals over two seasons have cost just over €200,000 each - ended up a point short of Europe's Elite.

ां VILLARREAL: SECOND-HALF SLIP

Villarreal's 3-2 defeat to Barcelona in early March was not supposed to herald a crash. Yet the Yellow Submarine went from making the Europa League Second Round and being a point short of fifth, to an 11 game winless streak, including elimination to Sevilla and ending the season 17 points short of Champions League football.



7月記 ATHLETIC BILBAO: EVENTUALLY ON THE UP

Despite only racking up 19 points in the first slate, Ernesto Valverde stuck to the 4-2-3-1 formation, earning a 1-0 win over Real Madrid and 36 points for only three second-half-season losses, not to mention a berth in the Copa del Rey Final. Downsides: losing Iker Muniain to an ACL tear, falling to Torino in Europe and relying on Aritz Aduriz's 18-goal tally. No-one else made it past five in

ि निर्मः। CELTA VIGO: SOLID AND SMOOTH

Fans at the Balaidos can hang their hats on a few things, namely Celta's giant-killing of Barcelona (away) and Atletico Madrid, as well as an exciting attacking trio of Nolito, Joaquin Larrivey and Fabian Orellana, who scored 29 goals between them. Nolito himself ended up as a top five assistman with 13. Los Célticos also added 13 points in second half play, second only to Real Madrid.

二元 MÁLAGA: MAYBE NEXT YEAR

Close to Europe until March, Málaga simply ran out of steam, winning just one of their last 11 La Liga games and conceding a horrifying seven goals in the last 10 minutes of play down the stretch. Though the defence shut Barcelona out in a suprise 1-0 win, it is ageing - Sergio Sanchez is the only starter not in his 30s - and didn't contribute a single goal at the other end.

[] | | | | | | | ESPANYOL: MID-TABLE MATTERS



Los Periquitos improved on 14th place by losing only three of their last 14 games. Deceptively respectable against Top 10 opponents in the second half of the season, Espanyol were not as ruthless in the Copa, where they were despatched by Athletic. Ended the season in hot water following racist chants in the Derby, a game they haven't won since 2009.

RAYO VALLECANO: GOALS, GOALS, GOALS

It's no surprise Ska-P chose to dedicate a song to Rayo, who somehow earned a monstrous 23 points on the road despite being outscored 42 to 20. Ruthlessly efficient against their peers, The Bees were anything but against their betters, whether it was losing 6-1 to Celta Vigo or drawing 4-4 at the Mestalla in the Copa, having lost 3-0 there only a few days previously.

P知识REAL SOCIEDAD: MOVEMENT WITH MOYES

The Basque outfit achieved the unusual accolade of somehow beating Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid with three different managers. Yet this pales in comparison to the work David Moyes has done, restoring cohesion, discipline and grittiness to a side languishing near the bottom of the table. At 1.37 points a game under the Scot, the Txuri-urdin would have been just shy of Athletic's record had he begun the season with them.

[上京] ELCHE: PLAYING UNDER PRESSURE

Who do you call when you've spent most of the winter in the bottom three, when your President has resigned, when your club is €40m in debt and unable to sign players in the transfer window? Fran Escriba, that's who! And to think Los Illicitanos were safe with three games to go. Jonathas' 14 goals were key, as no-one else bagged more than five.

神社 LEVANTE: LEVITATING THE LEAKY

What's that? Fran Escriba isn't available? Lucas Alcaraz will do! Though it wasn't pretty, the former Granada lifesaver orchestrated late wins in six-pointers against Eibar, Getafe, Almeria and Cordoba to keep La Liga's third-worst defence up. David Barral and Victor Casadesus combined for a crucial 19 goals.

RESIGNED"

Below

Jose Ramon Sandoval masterminded the most impossible of escapes from near-certain relegation

Bottom

Eibar's season had everything, except for the fairytale ending















"I'M AWFUL.
ICAN'T
EVEN PLAY
A *******
PASS, AND
THE TEAM'S
THE SAME.
I'M SICK OF
EVERYTHING"

GETAFE: GETTING THERE

The Azulones were always just about good enough to float above the relegation zone, never returning to the bottom three after matchday five. This is hardly a backhanded compliment, especially when both Cosmin Contra and Quique Sanchez Flores jilted the club midseason, leaving it to sputter its way to the finish with six defeats in nine games.

DEPORTIVO LA CORUNA: LAST DAY LUCK

Cash-strapped, short on talent, constantly barracked by their fans and fresh off another turn on the managerial merry-go-round, the once-proud Depor looked to be in deep trouble a month ago. With only one win in 10 and likely needing points from their visit to Barcelona to stay up, the Galicians, under former glory days winger Victor Sanchez, were lucky their opponents eased off after going 2-0 up, allowing for the most unlikely of comebacks.

GRANADA: THE GREAT ESCAPE

Talk about a timely managerial change. Six points from safety with four games to go, Granada somehow pulled off three wins and a draw to Atleti to stay up. Jose Ramon Sandoval didn't do it all himself, however, as Youssef El-Arabi grabbed key goals against Getafe, Cordoba and Real Sociedad to guarantee a sixth-straight season in La Liga, all without ever topping 15th place.



EIBAR: STORY OF THE SEASON

Someone should snap up the movie rights right away, as the plot writes itself: the fans crowdfunding €1.7m to guarantee promotion, a wild bunch of loanees and spare parts - appropriately sponsored by a scrap metal dealer - beating parent club Real Sociedad on opening day, racking up 26 points and 8th place in an impressive first half of the season, the catastrophic downfall... All that's missing is the Hollywood ending, as the Basque outfit's 3-0 win over Cordoba was moot once news came through that Deportivo had drawn at the Camp Nou.



ALMERIA: NOT ENOUGH

Though a draw wouldn't have been enough, Valencia's winner on the last day of the season against La Union was a fitting metaphor, the through-ball squeezing past Sebastian Dubarbier's desperate lunge to find Paco Alcacer. A valiant performance against Los Che wasn't enough to ensure survival, nor indeed to compensate for Almeria's many weaknesses, especially against set pieces.

CORDOBA: CALAMITY

Having come up in the most dramatic of fashions, Los Califas seemed to be acquitting themselves decently by early January, in 14th place and with Miroslav Djukic at the helm. From that point onwards, however... things went Pete Tong. No wins in the second half saw Djukic get the sack, and provoked Florin Andone's X-rated rant: "I'm awful. I can't even play a ******* pass, and the team's the same. I'm sick of everything."







After enduring 12 months of hardship, the new Lionel Messi is back at the very top of his game – and the League – as Daryl Hammond explains.

front of goal are sorely mistaken. He smashed two goals past Elche on the opening day of the season as a timely reminder. His most prolific run saw him bag three hat-tricks in four matches. A similarly fruitful spell saw him find the net in nine out of 10 matches.

He certainly hasn't lost his penchant for the spectacular either. Attempting to detail every match in which Messi had a profound impact would see this piece sprawled over several pages. He seldom scores simple goals, though sensational strikes against Almeria and Bayern Munich in the Champions League are particularly noteworthy. The Argentine has no flaws - well he did miss a few penalties, but criticising him for that is akin to chastising Gordon Ramsey for a few burnt fries.

However, while Messi's goal return was very healthy, he was outgunned for the second season running by his arch-rival Ronaldo. Indeed, with a personal best 48 goals in just 35 matches, one may wonder why it isn't Ronaldo's well-pruned face plastered across these pages. He was crowned Soccer 360's La Liga Player of the Year for 2013-14, and could so easily have won it again this year.

The Portuguese makes decisions like this an extremely difficult one, especially after back to back hat-tricks in the last two matches of the season. Definitively choosing between two players who week after week make the incomprehensible seem ordinary is a herculean task. This isn't a Messi vs. Ronaldo comparison, but it is again hard to deny the fact that the former Manchester United man has been Messi's main competition each season.

There was a temptation to give this prestigious accolade to someone other than the two obvious names. Neymar and Antoine Griezmann had seasons worthy of a mention, as did La Liga newcomers Luis Suarez and James Rodriguez. But ignoring them proved as difficult as separating them – and one of the best ways to do so is to look at the medals around their neck. Just as Ronaldo was able to dangle his awards in the face of Messi last year, the Argentine can

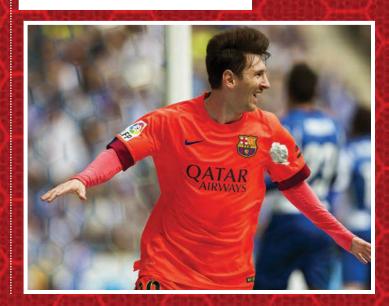
do very much the same with his League medal. Messi and his cohorts have also been exceptional outside the confines of the League, reaching the final of both the Champions League and the Copa del Rey. Meanwhile, Ronaldo and Co. did win both the Club World Cup and Supercopa de Espana, but it hardly constitutes a successful season - it certainly wasn't enough to keep Carlo

Ancelotti in a job.
Ronaldo can at least can point to his third
Pichichi award, though personal accolades have
never been the first thing on either player, as
Messi outlined recently: "I don't have objectives
to score goals and break records, though they're
nice things to achieve. My goals are to win
trophies and achieve everything that we possibly
can with this team. That's what we think about."
And yet that doesn't stop him from tearing into
several long-standing records. Messi was held
aloft by his teammates at the match against
Sevilla, as he surpassed Telmo Zarra to become
the all-time La Liga goal-scorer with 286, and he
claimed the assist record for himself, ousting Luis
Figo in the process.

Ten years on from when he first graced the Camp Nou turf as a shaggy-haired 17-year-old, the diminutive forward is still ardent on the pitch. He switches from seemingly lethargic to intensely fervent in a split second. His arbitrary yet calculated runs part defences and open space not only for himself but anyone in Blaugrana colours looking to get on the scoresheet. And once in the confines of the 18-yard box, defenders dive at his feet in vain, while he remains as calm and composed in front of goal. But as a senior member of the squad.

his influence now far surpasses the number of times he smashes the back of the net or finds a teammate.

One quote which totally explains how completely inexplicable the powers of the magical Argentine comes from the originative mouth of commentator Ray Hudson: "They tell me that all men are equal in God's eyes; this player makes you seriously think about those words." Messi is indeed the best – for this season at least.





t was always going to be a straight shootout between Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo for the League's leading scorer, having dominated the prize for the past five years. Though it was as if Messi forgot he was in the

race. More intent on creating goals than scoring them, he fell 12 goals behind his rival early in the season. Neymar was the beneficiary of his creativity, matching his tally for last year by November and surpassing Messi.

Matching the Brazillian's eventual total of 22 goals was Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann, who flourished in his new forward role, grabbing a hat-trick and seven braces throughout the season. Carlos Bacca meanwhile was unspectacular but consistent for Sevilla reach the magic 20-goal figure.

Premier League Golden Boot winner Luis Suarez may have been in contention for the Spanish prize were it not for his ban. Despite not scoring his first League goal until everyone had their Christmas stockings up, he still made the top 10, with a hat-trick against Cordoba aiding his cause. Alberto Bueno deserves a special mention after his stellar performance against Levante where he found the net four times in the first half. As does Aritz Aduriz, who is still banging in the goals at the tender age of 34.

Back in Barcelona, and Messi closed the gap and even overtook Ronaldo for a week, before the Portuguese hit back in brutal fashion, putting five goals past Granada. Consecutive hat-tricks at the end of the season took his tally to 48 and ensured the coveted trophy was his.

S360



"IT WAS
ALWAYS
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SHOOTOUT
BETWEEN
LIONEL
MESSI AND
CRISTIANO
RONALDO
FOR THE
LEAGUE'S
LEADING
SCORER"

2014/15 CAMPAIGN

LEAGUE TABLE

TEAM	w	D	L	PTS
Barcelona	30	4	4	94
Real Madrid	30	2	6	92
Atlético Madrid	23	9	6	78
Valencia	22	11	5	77
Sevilla	23	7	8	76
Villarreal	16	12	10	60
Athletic	15	10	13	55
Celta Vigo	13	12	13	51
Málaga	14	8	16	50
Espanyol	13	10	15	49
Rayo	15	4	19	49
Real Sociedad	11	13	14	46
Elche	11	8	19	41
Levante	9	10	19	37
Getafe CF	10	7	21	37
Deportivo	7	14	17	35
Granada	7	14	17	35
Eibar	9	8	21	35
Almería	8	8	22	29
Córdoba	3	11	22	20

TOP GOALSCORERS

PLAYER
Cristiano Ronaldo
Lionel Messi
Antoine Griezmann
Neymar
Carlos Bacca
Aritz Aduriz
Alberto Bueno
Luis Suárez
Karim Benzema
Sergio García
Jonathas
James Rodríguez
Nolito
Gareth Bale
Christian Stuani

G Real Madrid 48 Barcelona 43 Atletico Madrid Barcelona 22 20 18 Sevilla FC Athletic Bilbao 17 Rayo Vallecano Barcelona 16 Real Madrid 15 14 14 Espanyol Elche Real Madrid 13 Celta Vigo 13 13 12 Real Madrid Espanvol 12 Villarreal Atletico Madrid 12 Valencia 12 Celta Vigo 11 11 Levante

ā

18

16

13

13 10

10

9

9

9

7 7

MOST ASSISTS

DI AVED

Luciano Vietto

Daniel Pareio

David Barral

Mario Mandzukic

Joaquin Larrivey

Barcelona Lionel Messi Cristiano Ronaldo Real Madrid Luis Suárez Barcelona James Rodríguez Real Madrid Nolito Celta Vigo Karim Benzema Real Madrid Koke Atletico Madrid Sergio García Espanyol Denis Cheryshev Villarreal Isco Real Madrid **Gareth Bale** Real Madrid Xavi Barcelona Ivan Rakitic Barcelona Toni Kroos Real Madrid Ravo Vallecano Gael Kakuta Saúl Berjón Eibar Jonathas Elche Nevmar Barcelona Athletic Bilbao Markel Susaeta Real Madrid Marcelo

TOTAL LEAGUE GOALS

GOALS PER MATCH



TEAM OF THE YEAR

Claudio Bravo [Barcelona]

Tasked with the job of replacing Victor Valdes, he had the most clean sheets and broke a La Liga

Dani Alves [Barcelona]

Often underappreciated, he made the most tackles in the League as well as his usual surging runs down the right-hand side

Gerard Pique [Barcelona]

Had his doubters over the past few years, but showed why he is one of the best; part of the League's best Nicolas Otamendi [Valencia]

The commanding centre-back Spain, and has already attracted interest from the Premier League

José Luis Gaya [Valencia] Has stepped up in Juan Bernat's absence, drawing suitors from across Europe; a bright future in store for the 20-year-old.

Grzegorz Krychowiak [Sevilla] The often overlooked engine room in the heart of the Sevilla midfield, the Pole has impressed in his first

Dani Parejo [Valencia]

Real Madrid vs. Grenada

The Valencia captain was the joint-highest scorer with 11 goals and guided his side back to the Champions League.

James Rodriquez [Real Madrid] The costly Angel di Maria replacement showed his worth in an injury-hit first season, bagging both 13 goals and assists Antoine Griezmann [Atletico

Madrid]

Filled Diego Costa's boots and quickly became Atletico's most important player and top scorer

Cristiano Ronaldo [Real Madrid] Makes scoring 40+ goals a season seem almost normal. The League's top scorer with 48 and still one of

Lionel Messi [Barcelona] Messi put behind him a difficult 2013-14 campaign to bounce back with goals and assists, all the while adapting to a new role on the

MOST KEEPER WINS

PLAYER

Claudio Bravo Iker Casillas Diego Alves Mova Carlos Kameni Asenjo Iraizoz Kiko Casilla Sergio Alvarez Sergio Rico P. Tyton Beto Xabi Irureta Diego Marino Geronimo Rulli Tono Guaita Cristian Alvarez **Keylor Navas** Jan Oblack

w Barcelona 30 Real Madrid 24 Valencia 22 Athleitco Madrid 17 Malaga 14 14 Villarreal Athletic 13 Espanvol 13 12 Celta Vigo 12 Sevilla Elche 11 Sevilla 10 Eibar 9 Levante 8 Real Sociedad Rayo Vallecano Getafe Rayo Vallecano Real Madrid Atlético Madrid

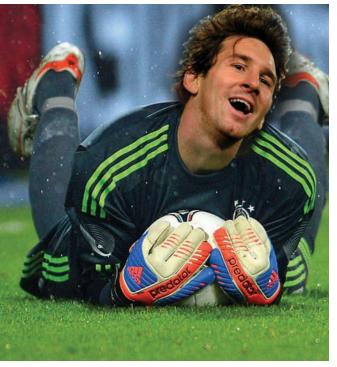


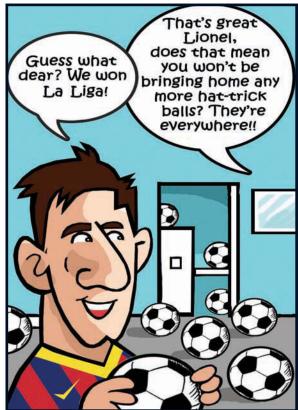
MOST CLEAN SHEETS

PLAYER Claudio Bravo

Barcelona 23 Asenio Villarreal 15 13 Kiko Casilla Espanvol Diego Alves Valencia 13 Athletic 12 Iraizoz Iker Casillas Real Madrid 12 12 Athleitco Madrid Mova Deportivo 11 Fabri Sergio Alvarez Celta Vigo Carlos Kameni Malaga 10 P. Tvton Elche 8 7 7 Eibar Xabi Irureta Roberto Granada Beto Sevilla Sergio Rico Sevilla Atlético Madrid Jan Oblack Juan Carlos Cordoba Geronimo Rulli Real Sociedad 6 Tono Rayo Vallecano 5 Guaita Getafe







'MESSI COULD PLAY IN GOAL'

Bayern Munich midfielder Thiago Alcantara feels former Barcelona teammate Lionel Messi could play anywhere on the pitch. "He's spectacular, incredible. If he played in goal he'd still score 25."



XAVI ADMITS BILBAO LOVE

Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernandez admits he would have liked to play for Athletic Bilbao. "I love Bilbao. I was there at Christmas, for the Basque Country vs. Catalonia match, and although I was wearing a cap I was stopped in the street and treated with such affection. It's a pity I couldn't play for Athletic for a couple of years," lamented Xavi.

IN SAFE HANDS

Iker Casillas, ever reliable as he is, has had a bit of a tough time at Real Madrid in the last few years, has bounced back at long last. That, or Real Madrid's defenders have been slacking, because San Iker recorded 131 saves in the 2014/15 season, the most of any goalkeeper in La Liga.

IN A SPOT OF TROUBLE

Lionel Messi capped off another successful year in Spain with a treble but those yearend celebrations might be cut short after it was announced that the Argentine star would face trial over charges of tax fraud to the tune of €4.1 million. Messi has been dealing with this issue for some time, but the case is heating up now.



"THERE IS NO RIVALRY WITH CR NALDO]. IT'S SOMETHING THE MEDIA NTED. WE BOTH WANT TO DO WELL

Lionel Messi comments on the media-fuelled battle for supremacy in Spain.

Atletico Madrid against Elche in late April meant he eclipsed Zinedine Zidane, Raymond Kopa and Karim Benzema to become the top-scoring Frenchman in a single La Liga season.

La Liga has produced the most Europa League quarter-finalists since the competition changed to its current format - nine in six seasons.

The record for most Primera trophies won by a foreign Coach is jointly held by Dutchman Johan Cruyff, who did it with Barcelona, and Helenio Herrera of Argentina, who managed the feat with both Barca and Atletico Madrid.

Legendary winger Francisco Gento holds the record for most Primera titles, all of them achieved with

Cristiano Ronaldo holds the record for most Champions League goals scored in calendar year, a feat he leved in 2013.

Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo has notched 27 hat-tricks in his six seasons with Los Blancos – a record for La Liga.

MAKING FRIENDS OR ENEMIES

Barcelona forward Neymar ended the season with a bit of controversy. The Brazilian attempted an overhead rainbow heel flick on an Athletico Madrid defender, who didn't take too kindly to being made a fool of, pushing Neymar over for a foul. His teammate, Xavi, didn't defend Neymar, though, telling reporters Nevmar needs some personal reflection to balance both flair and respect.

GARITANO IN PRESS WALKOUT

Eibar boss Gaizka Garitano abruptly cut short a Press conference following his side's 2-0 defeat at Almeria when local reporters complained he answered opening questions in Euskera, the Basque language. "When I go on Basque TV I answer in Euskera, but after the Almeria game they wouldn't let me so I decided to get up and go." he explained.





ADIOS, XAVI!

Barcelona's iconic midfield maestro, Xavi Hernandez, has brought his time in Spain to a close at last. With nearly two decades of professional football under his belt at Barcelona, Xavi captained his boyhood side to a fifth Champions League win, before flying off to Qatar to play with Qatari outfit Al Sadd SC.



LIVING THE DREAM

A video has surfaced of a young James Rodriguez booting up EA Sports' FIFA video game, placing himself in Real Madrid and scoring from a free kick. Then, the video cuts to a few years later, where Rodriguez, now with Real Madrid, scores that exact same goal! Coincidence, or destiny?

goals scored in the Champions League is held by Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo.

STICKING AROUND

It seemed, for a while, that Dani Alves was ready to call it quits with Barcelona but all that posturing seems to have paid off, as the Brazilian fullback signed a contract extension that will keep him with the Blaugrana for two more years. His fellow fullback, Jordi Alba, also signed an extension, with a €150 release clause!



THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

Lionel Messi has won everything there is to win in club soccer...except one accolade. It has eluded the Argentine for years and years. No matter how many goals or assists or dazzling runs Messi has produced for Barcelona, he has yet to win the La Liga Player of the Month title! Maybe next year, Leo!



Fly Entrate militate militate

DOMESTIC SHORTCOMINGS

Real Madrid's goal, last year, was winning a historic 10th Champions League title, and that goal was a success, but in La Liga, Madrid continues to struggle, to the chagrin of their fans. Real Madrid has won just one La Liga title in the last seven seasons, but have spent €755 million since 2009.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cristiano Ronaldo holds the record for most Golden Boot awards with four and is the first to win two editions of the trophy whilst playing for Real Madrid.

BY THE NUMBERS

Only nine teams have won La Primera since its inception in 1929: Real Madrid, Barcelona, Atletico Madrid, Athletic Bilbao (formerly Atletico Aviacion), Valencia, Real Sociedad, Real Betis, Sevilla and Deportivo la Coruna.

Real Sociedad hold the Primera record for the number of games unbeaten, achieving the distinction from April 1979 until October 1980.

DOWN AND OUT

Spanish outfit Elche has been relegated from La Liga, despite finishing 13th overall in the final table standings. Elche has faced financial difficulties and as such, the team could not stay in the top division any longer.

GOAL DROUGHT

This was a strange season for goal scoring in La Liga; Barcelona's front three of Luis Suarez, Lionel Messi and Neymar was the club's most successful, ever, but La Liga, overall didn't perform so well. Combined, La Liga teams only recorded 1009 goals in 2014/15. That's the lowest the goal tally has been since 2006/07.



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ahead from the Spanish Football Federation to permanently keep the Copa del Rey trophy they had won against Atletico Madrid that year. This was to commemorate the Spanish national team's victory at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. After their request was granted, a new one was subsequently commissioned.

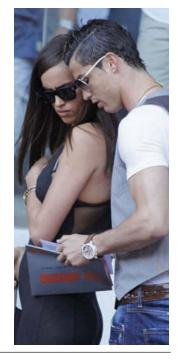
In May 2013 Valencia had to shelve plans to redesign the bat logo on their badge after DC Comics, who own the rights to Batman, complained it was too similar to the superhero's insignia.

Espanyol are the club that has completed the most seasons in La Liga without actually winning the title.

EARTH. LIKE REST OF US."

RONALDO'S TENNIS 'SELFIES'

Cristiano Ronaldo proved he is not only interested in football after taking time to meet fans at the Madrid Open tennis tournament. The Ballon d'Or winner attended home favourite Rafa Nadal's straight-sets win over Simone Bolelli and appeared more than happy to oblige fans wanting 'selfies' with him. 'How to stop Messi? Kick him' Former Milan and Italy midfielder Gennaro Gattuso says he would use physical means to stop Barcelona star Lionel Messi. Gattuso watched the Argentine's incredible Champions League semi-final display against Bayern Munich and afterwards gave defenders some advice. "How to stop him? I wouldn't know. Perhaps man-marking - or failing that just kick him!"



BY THE NUMBERS



Jose Mourinho has revealed that he tried to sign Steven Gerrard from Liverpool during his time in charge at Real Madrid. "I tried to bring him to Madrid but he refused to play for other big clubs, in other big leagues," said the current Chelsea boss. The Reds' captain will move to Major League Soccer this summer

MOURINHO WANTED **GERRARD**

when he joins Los Angeles Galaxy.

Gianluigi Buffon on Barcelona's most valuable player, Lionel Messi, ahead of the Champions League final.

ALVES STEALS

BARCA SHOW

Most La Liga Coaches insist players arrive at games smartly dressed in club suits or matching tracksuits, yet at Barcelona it appears anything goes. Ahead of the Champions League semi-final clash with Bayern Munich, rightback Dani Alves strolled into the Camp Nou in a red tuxedo jacket complete with bow tie, dress shorts, eccentric sunglasses and a pair of loafers.



"MESSI IS AN ALIEN, THAT DEDICATES HIMSELF TO PLAYING WITH

HUMANS. THE ONLY HOPE IS THAT THIS SATURDAY HE WILL BE FROM

RAFA NADAL DEFENDS IKER

Under-fire Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas found an unlikely ally in tennis star Rafael Nadal after fans blamed him for both goals in a 2-2 draw with Valencia. "Madrid fans give you everything but can make life difficult. They've whistled Cristiano Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane in the past and now it's Iker's turn. They should remember the contributions these players have made," he insisted.



ZIDANE EARNS UEFA LICENCE

The controversy surrounding Zinedine Zidane and his coaching credentials has come to an end. The Real Madrid legend took to Instagram to celebrate being awarded his official UEFA coaching badge. "Very proud to complete and receive my UEFA Pro Licence. Mission accomplished", he posted.



LA LIGA STRIKE AVERTED

A players' strike that threatened to disrupt the end of the Liga season was suspended after the Spanish High court decided it was illegal. The stoppage, called by the Spanish Football Association and the Players' Union following a dispute over the distribution of television revenue, would have halted the final two rounds of games as well as the Copa del Rey Final.

TEBAS LIKENED TO HITLER

Spanish League President Javier Tebas has received criticism from several quarters during the 2014-15 La Liga campaign. However, the most amazing verbal attack came from former Spain boss Javier Clemente. "Tebas is stuck in the times of [Adolf] Hitler, as boss of a concentration camp," was just one of the insults he posted on Twitter. Man Utd pair slam Bale

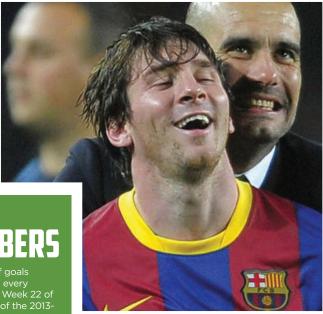
Two former Manchester United stars, now working as TV pundits, slammed Gareth Bale's performance in Real Madrid's 2-1 Champions League semi-final first leg defeat to Juventus. Roy Keane accused the Welshman of "not turning up and leaving his team with 10 men." while Paul Scholes said Bale's crosses were "food and drink for the Juve defence."

"CRISTIANO AS A PROFESSIONAL IS AN INSPIRATION AND EXAMPLE FOR CHILDREN, I IMAGINE WHAT HE WANTS TO DO IS ALWAYS **SCORE GOALS AND THAT BOUNDLESS**

Former Real Madrid Striker and now director of institutional relations institutional relations Emilio Butragueno insists Cristiano Ronaldo is a role model for youngsters due to the professionalism he shows.

PEP: 'MESSITHE BEST EVER'

Former Barcelona boss Pep Guardiola bowed down to Lionel Messi following his Bayern Munich side's Champions League semifinal loss to the Catalans. "He is back, at the level he was when I had the privilege to coach him. I compare him to Pele and I'm so happy to see this type of football. He's the best of all time," said Pep.



BY THE NUMBERS

The total number of goals
Barcelona scored in every
Primera game from Week 22 of
the 2011-12 season until Week 8 of the 201314 campaign.

In the 2011-12 season Barcelona managed to find the back of the net 114 times, a record for a team that did not win the League.

Catalonia minnows Lleida hold the unwanted record for most goals against in a Primera season, conceding 134 times in 30 games during the 1950-51 campaign.

ATHLETIC HONOUR LETISS

Southampton legend Matthew Le Tissier has become the surprise recipient of the first One Club Man Award bestowed by Athletic Bilbao. The former England striker, who retired in 2002, picked up the trophy at half-time of the derby with Real Sociedad, while footage of his goals appeared on giant screens at San Mames as he was given a standing ovation.



DID YOU KNOW?

Lionel Messi's two goals in three minutes in the 3-0 Champions League first leg victory over Bayern Munich this season was the quickest semi-final double in the history of the competition.

In La Liga, players are able to claim citizenship from the nation their ancestors came from. If a player does not have European ancestry he can apply for Spanish citizenship after playing in Spain for five years.

Messi became the youngest player to have scored 200 La Liga goals, a feat he achieved aged just 25.

पाको आल

DID YOU KNOW?

and Real Betis took place in 1915 but was forced to be abandoned due to crowd violence with Los Rojiblancos leading 4-3.

The first official football game played in Spain took place on March 8, 1890 in Seville between Recreativo de Huelva and Sevilla. With the exception of four players, all those taking part were British.

The Spain national team, known as La Seleccion, played at the Olympic Games for the first time in 1920, going on to win the silver medal in Antwerp.

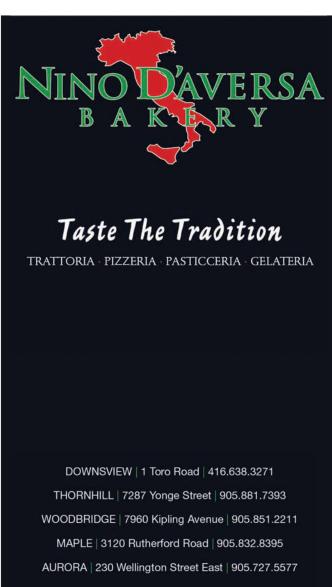
BY THE NUMBERS

La Primera's record number of goals scored ir a single season, when 22 clubs took part in 1996-97.

VALENCIA PAY NEPAL TRIBUTE

Valencia paid their own tribute to victims of the earthquakes in Nepal by wearing special shirts for the penultimate game of the season against Celta Vigo. Los Che players had their names written in Nepali during the 1-1 draw and afterwards offered their shirts for auction to help raise money for the relief effort.







The third Bundesliga title in a row but fans are expecting more next year.

Right A genius in his own right, some are wondering if Pep Guardiola's tactics have actually set the German club back.

nother League title, another dominant performance on the pitch and...another failure in the Champions League. So goes the recent history of Bayern Munich. A club. held hostage by sky-high expectations, that's been equally mired in success and failure.

There are few clubs in the world where two seasons of just domestic dominance is seen as a failure, but like the end of their campaign a year ago, the culmination of the 2014-15 season sees Bayern fans again frustrated at the most crucial juncture of the season. Last year it was Real Madrid's counter-attacking

masterclass that undid Pep Guardiola's side. A 4-0 drubbing at the hands of the Spanish giants at the Allianz left many Bayern fans dissatisfied. But cooler heads prevailed; it was his inaugural season after all and the general consensus was that he would be even better next year.

The season saw some changes for Bayern. Toni Kroos moved on to Real Madrid, in search of a new challenge and better wages. He was accompanied to the city by Mario Manduzkic who made the transfer to city rivals Atletico. The ever-frustrated Xherdan Shaqiri was also deemed surplus to requirements. Halfway through the campaign the Swiss attacker was shipped off to

Bayern, however, would add more depth to replace them. Robert Lewandowski's longawaited transfer finally came through, and the addition of Spaniards Juan Bernat and Xabi Alonso, as well as Roma's Medhi Benatia added some more defensive steel to the lineup. Alonso, a surprise last-minute transfer brought as cover for Javi Martinez after his pre-season knee ligament tear derailed his entire campaign, started brilliantly. As the fulcrum of the midfield he was given full reign over it, orchestrating from the back. At one point early on he even broke the Bundesliga record for touches in a game. But the veteran's impact declined as the season went on and it's unclear whether he can still sustain a





Bayern Numbers

TOP GOAL SCORER

Arien Robben 17 Robert Lewandowski Thomas Müller Mario Götze 9 Bastian Schweinsteiger 5

TOP ASSISTS

Thomas Müller 10 Franck Ribéry Arjen Robben Robert Lewandowski 5 Sebastian Rode

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

80

18

THIS YEAR

Record: 25-4-5 Home: 14-1-2 Away: 11-3-3 Finish: 1st

LAST YEAR

Record: 29-3-2 Home: 15-1-1 14-2-1 Awav: Finish: 1st



high level of football over the course of an entire season anymore.

Full-back Bernat may have been the surprise package of the season. To those that didn't follow his excellent campaign for Valencia the season prior, his consistency was remarkable. At only 22, Bernat has a bright future ahead of him in Germany. He's even provided Guardiola with the option of playing the versatile David Alaba in midfield or even further up the wing.

Unlike last year, however, it wasn't tactical failures as much as it was bad luck with injuries that did Bayern in. Thiago Alcantara suffered yet another injury-plagued campaign and coupled with Martinez's aforementioned injury, a usually deep Bayern team found itself struggling to replace players at times. For example, heading to the Camp Nou for the first leg of the Champions league semi-final against Barcelona, the Bayarian side were without Arjen Robben, Franck Ribery,

Apart from the injuries, the biggest disappointment of the campaign may have been the development, or lack thereof, of Mario Gotze It all started well, brimming with confidence off the back of his match-winning goal in the World Cup final, the 23-year-old attacker started the season in sparkling form. When he was deployed centrally he shined living up to all the potential he'd shown in the past few years. But the second half of the season saw his confidence and quite frankly his engagement on the pitch wane. Granted he was pushed out wide where he tends to have less of an impact, but overall Gotze just looked lazy on the pitch.

And after months of inconsistent play from their highest paid player it was his apparent nonchalance as he joked with Barcelona goalkeeper and country mate Marc-Andre ter Stegen after Bayern lost 3-0 that was the straw that broke the camel's back in the eyes of most Bayern fans.

Outside of Gotze, when it mattered most, Bayern

shrunk. In the League they were dominant as usual and despite the odd challenger no-one else seriously posed a threat to the German side. Robert Lewandowski's 25 goals - 16 in the Bundesliga - debunked the myth that traditional No 9s can't play in Pep's system. The transition wasn't exactly seamless but he adapted well over time and added a serious goal threat to Bayern. In the coming years he should perform even better as he continues to adapt.

But apart from their unlucky injury concerns one wonders if Bayern would actually benefit from a more competitive Bundesliga. Both this season and last Bayern's dominance in the League resulted in them wrapping up the title long before their bigger European ties. Rest and rehabilitation is always good but there is often a danger of too much. Real Madrid last year, and Barcelona this campaign were both firmly in the throes of a tight League race when they played Bayern in the semi-finals and their sharpness showed. Bayern in both years looked a half-step slower, their domestic success seemingly lulling them into a catatonic state on the biggest stage. To be fair, Bayern did look spellbinding at times. Their Champions League demolition job against Roma in the group stage, and their second leg comeback vs. Porto, were prime examples of what the three-time reigning German champions can do on top form. But those performances will likely be an afterthought as the questions of their fragility in the semi finals take prominence. After the match Guardiola called the result 'harsh'. "We wanted to dominate possession and push them back," he said.

Bayern are again crawling to the end of a season. They've lost four games in a row for the first time since 1991, and look like they want to be anywhere else but a football pitch. It's a problem they've struggled with - pacing. The season is a marathon not a sprint, yet for the second consecutive year it seems Bayern are focused more on getting ahead early, rather than winning

the race at the end.

Age is also beginning to play a factor and as rumors of Raheem Sterling surface it's clear that Bayern intend to be active players in this summer's transfer market. Their dependence on Robben and Ribery. 31 and 32 respectively. can't continue if the club plans to get back the Champions League Final anytime soon. Or perhaps all of these doomsday theories about Pep's style and Bayern's failures are nothing more than hyperbole. It's not like the squad has been eliminated in the early stages of the UCL, both times they've likely lost to the best team in the tournament. But more than the losses have been the performances.

An injury-free campaign, or even a slightly less disastrous injury campaign, likely makes this an entirely different season for Bayern. Still, injuries are a part of the game and excuses can only last so long.

IT COMES DOWN TO THIS

Pep Guardiola is quite adamant that he'll be the Coach of Bayern Munich next season. But rest assured, confidence is running thin and next season will be make or break for the tikitaka guru. Not to mention it's the last year of his contract.

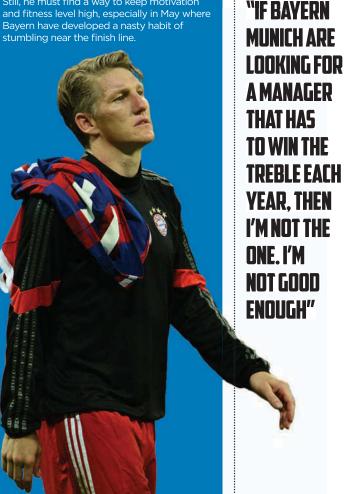
As incredulous as it sounds, a domestic double will not be enough to save Pep next season, especially if Bayern's Europear adventures end as embarrassingly as they have the past two years. It's just what comes with the territory of coaching the German giants. This year we saw a bit more frustration out of Pep. His highly publicised spat with the long-time, and now former Bayern team doctor, Hans-Wilhelm Müller-Wohlfahrt was aired out in public for all to see and wasn't

Pep will always be compared to former Bayern Coach Jupp Heynckes, who won a famous treble with the club in his last season in 2013. Heynckes' ability to deliver on the biggest stages, and namely Bayern's 7-0 Champions League semi-final aggregate victory over Barcelona that year, hangs like a cloud over Guardiola's head. The pressure is further exacerbated by Pep's own failures at the same stage.

For all his mastery and tactical understanding, until Pep can overcome his semi-final shortcomings he will always be judged by those, admittedly lofty, standards. Injuries were his undoing this year so it's tough to blame him for everything that's gone wrong. Still, he must find a way to keep motivation and fitness level high, especially in May where



was a surprise, Robert Lewandowski's wasn't, but both played a major role in Bayern's 2014-15 campaign.



Bayern Munich may have run TOPOF away with the Bundesliga title, but Wolfsburg, Borussia Monchengladbach and Bayer Leverkusen all end with cause for optimism, as Michelle Bonsu THE TABLE

Top Right

His quick-fire brace against Werder Bremen on 1st March made him the most efficient striker in German football history

Bottom Right Bayern had only

conceded four goals all season. It took Wolfsburg less than 90 minutes to double that in January's meeting

CHARGES

CAN STILL

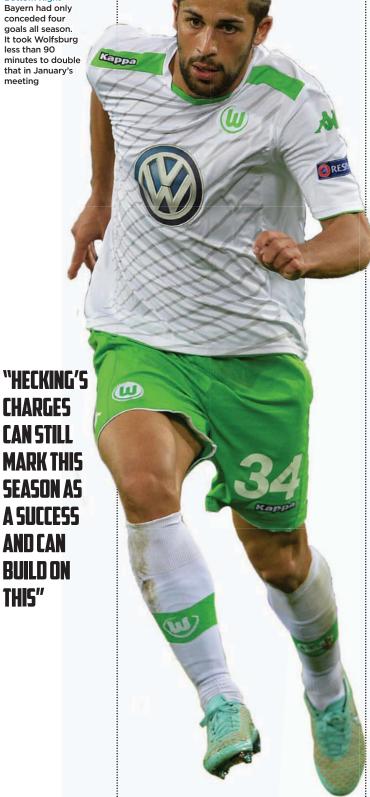
SEASON AS

A SUCCESS

AND CAN

BUILD ON

THIS"





ffWere you not entertained?" If one were to ask to describe Wolfsburg's 2014-15 Bundesliga campaign in a solitary phrase, a twist on Russell Crowe's famous line from the film Gladiator would do fine. After disappointingly missing out on a Champions League spot by just one point last term, Dieter Hecking's men will be in Europe's premier competition after securing a second-placed berth that some had thought would be Borussia Dortmund's.

Ever since seizing the runners-up spot on Matchday 10 following an impressive fivematch win streak, Die Wölfe have been largely untroubled. The start of 2015 was a difficult one as young Belgian midfielder Junior Malanda was tragically killed in a car wreck at the tender age of 20, on January 10, but the team bounced back with a shocking demolition of title-holders Bayern Munich just 20 days later. In fact, prior to their meeting, Pep Guardiola's men had just conceded four goals all season - it took Wolfsburg just 73 minutes to match that tally. The early part of this year saw the rapid emergence of Bas Dost, with the Dutch international's sudden hot streak in front of goal seeing him net an impressive 11 goals in his first six appearances, whilst prior to that, he had just scored twice in the first half of this season.

Whilst Dost's form would cool down as the season progressed, Wolfsburg's domestic performances largely did not, and although Bayern would - not surprisingly - clinch the title as had been predicted at the start of the season, Hecking's side bettered BVB's attempts to unseat them. They finished a fairly respectable points tally behind - something that if one looks at other leagues across Europe is quite encouraging and has many believing - a tad too optimistically perhaps - in the possibility of a closer competition next term.

On the continent, they started fairly strong and were widely viewed as favourites to win it all in the Europa League. However a run-in with Serie A opposition would prove to be their downfall - namely the Round of 16 first leg when they were thrashed 4-1 at home by Napoli, making a 2-2 draw at the Stadio San Paolo a moot point. Nonetheless, after making it to their first DFB Pokal in 20 seasons, Hecking's charges can still mark this season as a success and can build on this, provided they can keep hold of key players with both Dost and Kevin De Bruyne finding their names repeatedly linked with exits to the Premier League.



WOLFSBURG NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Bas Dost	16
Kevin De Bruyne	10
Naldo	7
Daniel Caligiuri	7
VfL Wolfsburg	6

TOP ASSISTS

Kevin De Bruyne	20
Vieirinha	5
Ricardo Rodríguez	4
Ivan Perisic	4
Bas Dost	4

GOALS FOR

GOALS **AGAINST**

72

38

THIS YEAR

20-9-5
13-4-0
10-4-5
2nd

LAST YEAR

18-6-10 Record: Home: 11-3-3 7-3-7 Finish: 5th



BORUSSIA MÖNCHENGLADBACH - ONWARDS AND UPWARDS



BORUSSIA M. NUMBERS

TOP GOAL SCORER

Raffael Araújo Max Kruse 11 Patrick Herrmann 11 André Hahn 3 Ibrahima Traore

TOP ASSISTS

Max Kruse Thorgan Hazard **Fabian Johnson** 4 4 Patrick Herrmann Branimir Hrgota

GOALS FOR

GOALS AGAINST

53

26

THIS YEAR

Record: 19-9-6 12-3-2 Home: 7-6-4 Away: Finish:

LAST YEAR

16-7-11 Record: 11-3-3 Home: Away: Finish: 6th

"IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE. **BUT JUST SEVEN SEASONS** AGO. THEY WERE **ACTUALLY** IN GERMAN

Postbank

massive turn-around since taking control

of Gladbach in 2011..

where do they go from

FOOTBALL'S

SECOND

TIER."

t is hard to believe it, but just seven seasons ago, Borussia Mönchengladbach were actually in German football's second tier, a shocking fact especially given how they were the country's top club back in the 1970s. Since returning to the top flight in 2008, though, Die Fohlen have gone from strength to strength and alongside fellow Champions League contenders Leverkusen and Wolfsburg are one of just a few teams to take all three points against Bayern this season. In his fourth full season since taking over in February 2011, Swiss tactician Lucien Favre has seen his squad improve by leaps and bounds. The first half of this campaign was a solid one as Gladbach concluded their Europa League group stage by finishing top of the pile sans a single loss, whilst in the Bundesliga, despite at one point posting three straight losses, they headed into the Christmas hiatus in a solid fourth place a vast improvement on their sixth placed finish last time around.

Whilst 2015 would be disappointing in Europe as they were outclassed and outplayed by reigning champions Sevilla, fortune began to smile on Favre's squad as an impressive 13-match unbeaten streak - with defeats of Wolfsburg and Leverkusen - now has them firmly in third spot and returning to the Champions League after a lengthy hiatus.

With a crop of hungry and exciting players including Chelsea star Eden Hazard's vounger brother Thorgan, Fabian Johnson, Max Kruse and most recently, the experienced Lars Stindl, things look set to be interesting at the 'other Borussia club' next season. Christoph Kramer, who has been solid in the middle of the park for Borussia Mönchengladbach over the past couple of seasons, will return to parent club Leverkusen. Although the German international formed a good partnership with his Swiss colleague Granit Xhaka, new signing Stindl presents a more attacking approach and could present another option for Favre as they seek to become even more competitive during the 2015-16 campaign. Naturally, given that they have made the stepup to the Champions League, expect some more young and raw talents to be brought into the fold. After all, this is the club that a certain Marco Reus and Marc-Andre ter Stegen honed their skills at before their moves to Dortmund and Barcelona, so it looks set to be an exciting summer and upcoming season as they continue to grow and slowly find their way. But, as things $\,$ appear, Germany's own 'little horses' appear to be on the right path in what has been arguably their best showing since clawing their way back up from the second-tier at the end of the 2007-08 term.



BAYER LEVERKUSEN - VENTURING FOURTH

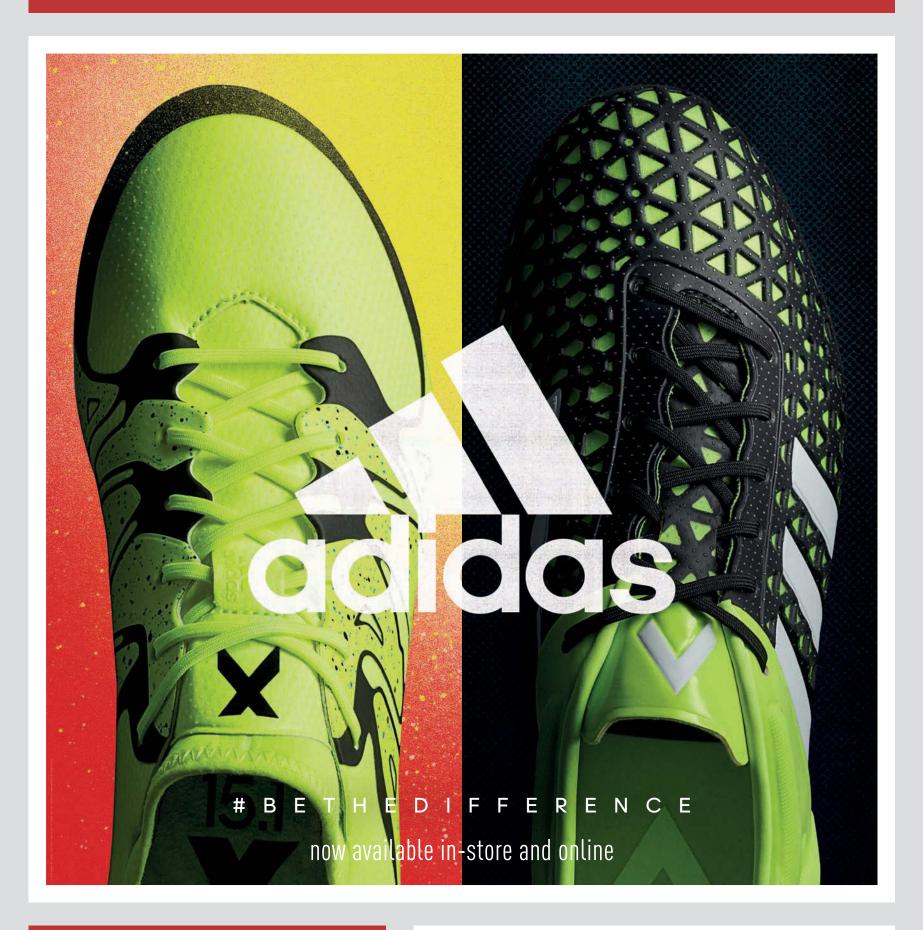


"THE SUCCESS **NF THE** MANAGER. THOUGH. CANNOT **ARRIVE** WITHOUT THE CORRECT PERSONNEL. AND **LEVERKUSEN'S SIGNINGS HAVE** INDEED COME THROUGH"

New manager Schmidt has earned praise from sporting director Rudi Völler due to his allaction, risky footballing tactical approach

Karim Bellarabi has become a whole new player under the guidance of Schmidt and wrote his name into the Bundesliga history books with a "blink and you'll miss it" goal the start of the season

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Paul Hill takes you through the winners and losers from positions fifth to 18th in the 2014-15 Bundesliga.



Above

The top goal scorer in the 2014 Serie A season failed to live up to his billing as the replacement for Robert Lewandowski, collecting a mere three goals in 24 League

Right

The former Chelsea man resigned from his post shortly after what was a disappointing Bundesliga for the club

The Argentine enjoyed a stellar season. collecting one goal in every two League starts. Still only 26, a big move may be imminent in the summer











"A TERRIFIC EUROPEAN **VICTORY** IN MADRID **WASN'T** ENOUGH **TO SAVE WHAT WAS A TERRIBLE** CAMPAIGN **FOR THE**







AUGSBURG: FAIRYTALE IN BAVARIA

With a budget of around €20m the climb of tiny Augsburg has been nothing short of remarkable; a team of journeymen and hungry youngsters managing to claim a top five spot has been the feel good story of the season. However, coping with the Europa League schedule next term will be a challenge.



enough to save what was a terrible campaign for the team from Gelsenkirchen. Finishing 13 points off a Champions League place, Roberto Di Matteo's men not only gained distinctly average results all season long, but the brand of football was also particularly underwhelming.

ケイマン BORUSSIA DORTMUND: DAMAGE LIMIT

Borussia Dortmund being bottom at Christmas was one of the most astonishing occurrences in all of football this term. The departing Jurgen Klopp did manage to turn things around in 2015 to some extent with Europa League qualification and a Cup final but Thomas Tuchel will be hoping to sail The Yellow Submarine back into the upper echelons of the Bundesliga table.

: 万村 HOFFENHEIM: MORE RESTRICTION, SAME RESULTS

The village club may have finished a position higher than the previous season but they still managed to gain the exact amount of points. Playing with a more cautious approach that the 'If you score six, we'll score seven' style of 2013-14, the attacking trident of Kevin Volland, Roberto Firmino and Anthony Modeste was unable to push the side into Europa League contention.

FRANKFURT: A SEASON OF IMPROVEMENT

The goals of Alexander Meier and Haris Seferovic helped propel the retiring Thomas Schaaf's team into the top half of the table. The new man in charge will have a challenge of keeping the team together as well as the collective mentality it possesses.



When Viktor Skripnyk took over in October, 2004 champions Werder Bremen were at the foot of the Bundesliga and favourites to go down. Seven months later and the Ukrainian had the Green and Whites fighting for a Europa League place in the season's final game, a remarkable turnaround for a side that shows huge promise for next season.

ង្គែដូ MAINZ: SEASON OF STABILITY

While Christian Heidel's men didn't reach the dizzy heights of last term, the side managed to remain stable throughout and easily retain their Bundesliga place. Loris Karius looks to be a future star between the posts and a pre-season sale of the 22-year-old could facilitate a number of important signings.

| とない KOLN: SAFE CAMPAIGN BACK

Hennes the Goat aside, everyone in Cologne appeared to have a rather successful season. After winning Bundesliga 2 in 2013-14, survival was always going to be the objective this year and Peter Stoger's men achieved that aim quite comfortably whilst in the process also finding the potential long-term solution for Germany's troublesome left-back position in Jonas Hector.

は fi 付け HANNOVER 96: A CLOSE SHAVE

A winless run of 16 League games in 2014-15 tells its own story. Two victories right the end of the campaign was enough to ensure survival but questions will be asked and a rebuild will be contemplated over the next few months.

\$ STUTTGART: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Huub Stevens returned to the south of Germany for a second successive time to manage Stuttgart away from relegation. Despite spending the majority of 2014-15 in the relegation zone, the Southerners finished 14th and new manager Alexander Zorniger has a good enough squad to achieve a top half finish in 2015-16.

TEAM"

Right

Six goals in 27 League appearances explains it. The Ivorian failed to light up the German capital like he did in Northern France the two seasons previous

Middle

The young Austrian showed maturity beyond his years in his debut Bundelsiga season, with performances that have been rewarded with a move to White Hart Lane to shore up the Tottenham Hotspur defence









"STILL THE ONLY BUNDESLIGA TEAM NEVER TO BE RELEGATED"

Right

The fact that Kachunga was Paderborn's top League scorer with only six goals tells its own story as to where the side's problems lay

HERTHA BERLIN: A DISAPPOINTING RETURN

After investing in a squad overhaul in pre-season, Europa League qualification was seen as a distinct possibility for the club from the capital. However, the likes of Valentin Stocker and Salomon Kalou didn't come off and Hertha only finished one place above the relegation positions. Perennial underachievers.



MIMME



Still the only Bundesliga team never to be relegated, Bruno Labbadia's side face another relegation playoff. Clearly a top half squad on paper, the Northern giants are in need of a mass clearout in order to be challenging where a club of its stature should be. Captain Rafael van der Vaart has already confirmed his exit.



FREIBURG: FINALLY DOWN

After six years in the Bundesliga Freiburg finally made their exit from the top tier on the final day of the season but are well placed to bounce straight back up. This will be scant consolation for manager Christian Streich, who was tearful after his side were condemned.

PADERBORN: SECOND HALF COLLAPSE

No one expected the Bundesliga new boys to finish bottom at Christmas. After heading out of the winter break in 10th, the side from the Rhineland collapsed and now face the task of not becoming a yo-yo club between Germany's top two divisions.



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DE BRUYNE HAS
TAKEN HIS PLACE AS
THE BUNDESLIGA'S TOP
THE BUNDESLIGA'S TOP
OG. BRINGING BOTH
SMALL AS WELL AS
LARGER PREY DOWN
WITH EQUAL EASE

A fair chance was all Kevin De Bruyne wanted, and he's gotten it at Wolfsburg. His opponents last season had consistently wished for one too and been left disappointed, dumped on the ground as the redoubtable Belgian swaggered off to another assist, or one more fine finish.

Around them, De Bruyne's teammates celebrated the unfair advantage they've been bestowed with. The type to propel them up to second in the Bundesliga, and back into the Champions League. It is not just that Wolfsburg managed to do it, but how they did it as well. Their fruitful hunt to propel themselves back to domestic reckoning was achieved with pace, power and panache.

"We shouldn't only dream about playing good football," De Bruyne said, and thanks to him, they don't. The Wolves had been far from finicky, devouring their opponents as an excellent campaign reached its climax. As for him, he's taken his place as the League's top dog, bringing both small as well as larger prey down with equal ease, storming to match the all-time record of 20 assists in the German top-flight while appearing in every game of the season.

Those are significant numbers, as if numbers alone could define his impact. "I'm lost for words to describe Kevin," admitted Coach Dieter Hecking. "He's got outstanding qualities and an incredible ability to fire up his teammates with his style of play."

The vision, speed - his ability to show the opponent the ball then quickly take it away - and flair had been seen before. Instead, it was his level of influence and consistency, a force of nature in Wolfsburg's rapid rise, that surprised some initially, marking De Bruyne out as the revelation of the season. Except that Belgium's brightest at Brazil 2014 wasn't exactly a revelation. Even if the €25m buy at the beginning of the World Cup year does seem a bargain in retrospect. It's immediately apparent the ginger-haired playmaker commands the respect of those around, their attention as well. "You have to say that he is the best player in the Bundesliga, and not only because of his stats," Marcel Schafer, veteran of the club's 2009 title triumph, rhapsodised. The 24-year-old hasn't so much cemented his promising talent status at Volkswagen Arena as announced himself to the world in the mould of a bona-fide superstar. Now what is remarkable about his feats are that they are no longer really remarkable

"I'm a natural born winner. When I play football, I have fun," De Bruyne enthused, but it had not always been that way, success in his career not always assured. Certainly not success of this kind, anyway. Europe's king of the killer pass may have illuminated Wolfsburg's campaign, yet the prospects that lay ahead of him had been shrouded in uncertainty before. Once pushed to the periphery at his former club Chelsea, De Bruyne struggled. Too often, Jose Mourinho mistook his quietness for shyness.

The maligned player received no explanation but he never asked for one either. Instead, he asked to leave, pleading for Chelsea to accept Wolfsburg's big money offer when it arrived. Soon, both arrived as well, into the spotlight. De Bruyne has driven the Auto-City-Club with European ambitions and the financial backing of automobile giants Volkswagen back from the provinces and up to the glamour of the Champions League.

It was a route Wolfsburg hadn't taken in some time but the destination was what mattered and they were in a hurry to get there. Here was football played without handbrakes, their Belgian dynamo supercharging their season, sending them hurtling forward at speeds unknown since the 2009 vintage. Bayern Munich were steamrollered 4-1 by De Bruyne's brace as a new German power raced into view at the start of 2015. Victory then had been their ninth game unbeaten at home last term - they've since made it 17 out of 17.

"For an attacking player like me, this is a really good time. That's down to the fact that we play quickly and directly," De Bruyne said. Weekly contribution has come to be measured in the number of decisive moments created, and he's emerged as the team's de facto leader. What seems so obvious now had not been before. The big addition to the pack turned out to have fangs, and no shortage of personality after all. No shortage of opportunities to prove it too, the rare kind to make others play better when he plays well.

Daniel Caligiuri speaks of a belief that





teammates 'just have to make the runs and he will put the ball on your foot', the preferred one too. Even then, De Bruyne is keen to downplay talk of Wolfsburg as its star and 10 others, talking up his confidence in the collective and explaining when you give assists you always need someone to convert them to goals', calling the communion with the team 'wonderful'.

Behind him are his club and Coach. On the field, to his left, he has Andre Schurrle; in front, Bas Dost. Comparisons to their predecessors, when Edin Dzeko, Grafite and Zvjezdan Misimovic ruled in Wolfsburg's maiden title season by combining for 61 goals and 41 assists, may be hasty. Yet they reflect the enthusiasm for the future spreading in the stands. "We just click," Schurrle said after his debut. "Kevin likes to be able to drift out wide to the left and I like to every now and then burst through in central positions. Bas plays the channels and holds up the ball well up front." Their small partnership, it seems, could be what makes the team great again.

Last season's runners up will still want to add to that, knowing time at the top is not so much about getting there as it is about staying there. History and prestige could only sustain Bayern's rivals in the eternal challenge to displace them at the Bundesliga summit for so long, but lots and lots of cash might just allow Wolfsburg to succeed where others have failed. And here De Bruyne confirmed Wolfsburg's ambitions, simply stating that the capability to play expansive football in three competitions next term would be expensive: "If you want to compete then you need to buy good players, that's always been a part of football."

Wolfsburg will prowl the transfer market this summer looking to add the next big name to their numbers, but aware the biggest name already resides in their midst. "We've got a terrific character in our ranks here. De Bruyne always wants to win and that's the kind of player you need, the kind that makes the difference in a tight game," Hecking said, vindicated by the decision to champion his protege. "We're now talking about a player who's extraordinary."

Scandalously good for a player outside of a Bayern Munich jersey, the offers that will arrive for him will be huge; the need for Wolfsburg to resist them and prove they can match De Bruyne's hunger for success, huger. "At the moment, I'd call him unsellable," declared sporting director Klaus Allofs. "We're talking about [De Bruyne seeing out his contract to] 2019 here, that feels further away than [the 2018 World Cup in] Qatar. I know how Kevin ticks and I also know how highly he rates what he's got here. He knows that we're building a team around him." "I'm very happy here," De Bruyne confirmed. "I feel at home and at this moment I'm even willing to sign a new contract." Next season will be his first as a main protagonist in the Champions League. Awesome in attack, leader of the pack they knew he would be, none dare to underestimate him now. Opponents especially. And for Wolfsburg, that's perfect.





njured in April, Eintracht Frankfurt forward Alexander Meier may have worried that his tally of 19 goals would never take him across the finish line as the Bundesliga's top scorer. The veteran surrendered to his reality even before 2015 started, saying: "It'll be someone from Bayern Munich [who clinches the prize]." But still the veteran showed no sign of slowing, and not even the Rekordmeister hotshots could catch the 32-year-old, who only ever made two youth appearances for his country. The quiet German's haul was made all the more remarkable given it had been secured over 26 games, putting him up for the top scorer tag with a shout. Yet if 2015 belonged to anyone, it was Bas Dost. Far from a new face with Wolfsburg, a mix of injury and playing second fiddle meant fans had seen little of him till the new year. That only contributed to the shock factor when he was unleashed on unsuspecting defences. The penalty box Dutchman was soon clocking a goal every 90 minutes. He finished the campaign having struck 16 times in only 21 games, a stunning poker during Wolfsburg's 5-4 win at Leverkusen one of his standout contributions. A brace against Bayern in the first match of the Ruckrunde remains the defining moment of his season, however.

Arjen Robben and Robert Lewandowski, jointrunners up in the marksmen charts, had inflicted on them what they otherwise did to others every other week. Injury cruelly prevented Robben from enjoying a fitting finish to his best ever season, but Lewandowski grew into his role as the season wore on to establish himself as a key part in Die Roten's 25th Bundesliga success.

MEIER NUMBERS

GOALS
0
7
0
9
7
6
4
3
10
2
17
16
8
19
101
23

"IT'LL BE **SOMEONE** FROM **BAYERN MUNICH (WHO CLINCHES THE** PRIZE]."

rombacher

It'll be someone from Bayern Munich [who clinches the prize].

2014/15 CAMPAIGN

LEAGUE TABLE

TEAM	W	D	L	PTS
FC Bayern München	25	4	5	79
VfL Wolfsburg	20	9	5	69
Mönchengladbach	19	9	6	66
Bayer 04 Leverkusen	17	10	7	61
FC Augsburg	15	4	15	49
FC Schalke 04	13	9	12	48
Borussia Dortmund	13	7	14	46
TSG 1899 Hoffenheim	12	8	14	44
Eintracht Frankfurt	11	10	13	43
SV Werder Bremen	11	10	13	43
1. FSV Mainz 05	9	13	12	40
1. FC Köln	9	13	12	40
Hannover 96	9	10	15	37
VfB Stuttgart	9	9	16	36
Hertha Berlin	9	8	17	35
Hamburger SV	9	8	17	35
SC Freiburg	7	13	14	34
SC Paderborn 07	7	10	17	31

TOP GOALSCORERS

Frankfurt

Bavern

Bayern

Bavern

Wolfsburg

Dortmund

Bayer 04

Bayer 04

Hannover 96

Wolfsburg

Frankfurt

1. FC Köln

FC Augsburg

FC Schalke 04

FC Schalke 04

Werder Bremen

1. FSV Mainz 05

Mönchengladbach 12

Mönchengladbach 11

Mönchengladbach 11

19 17

17

16

16

13

12

10 10

10

10

DI AVED

Bas Dost Aubameyang Thomas Müller

Raffael

Alexander Meier

Franco Di Santo

Karim Bellarabi

Patrick Herrmann Max Kruse

Heung-Min Son

Kevin De Bruvne

Haris Seferovic

Anthony Ujah

Raul Bobadilla

Eric Maxim Klaas-Jan Huntelaar

Lars Stindl

Shinji Okazaki

Robert Lewandowski

Arien Robben

Qualified for 2015-16

Qualified for 2015-16 Europa League





Dortmund vs. Bayer 04





LOWEST ATTENDANCE

Paderborn vs. Hoffenheim





LARGEST GOAL GAP

Bayern vs Hamburg Sv





HIGHEST GOAL TOTAL

Frankfurt vs Stuttgart





MOST ASSISTS

DI AVED Kevin De Bruvne Zlatko Junuzovic Thomas Müller Roberto Firmino Max Kruse Jonathan Schmid Arjen Robben Franck Ribery **Gonzalo Castro** Thorgan Hazard Aubamevang Karim Bellarabi Eric Maxim Hakan Calhanoglu immy Briand Alexandru Maxim Robert Lewandowski Haris Seferovic Kevin Volland

Wolfsburg 20 Werder Bremen 12 Bayern 10 Hoffenheim 10 Mönchengladbach 9 SC Freiburg Bayern Bayern Bayer 04 Mönchengladbach 7 **Dortmund** Bayer 04 FC Schalke 04 Bayer 04 6 6 Hannover 96 VfB Stuttgart Bayern Frankfurt Hoffenheim Dortmund

TOTAL LEAGUE GOALS

Marco Reus

MATCH

GOALS PER

TEAM OF THE YEAR

Manuel Neuer [Bayern Munich]: Germany's sweeper-keeper recorded 20 clean sheets for Bayern Munich and kept involved throughout with his repertoire of tricks, flicks and throw-ins Naldo [Wolfsburg]: Handy to have at both ends of the pitch, the veteran centre-back netted a whopping seven goals while ably leading Wolfsburg's defence Jerome Boateng [Bayern Munich]: The best defender at Brazil 2014 continues growing from strength to strength and was instrumental in Bayern Munich having the Ricardo Rodriguez [Wolfsburg]:

Equipped with a sizzling leftfooted strike from set-pieces, the Swiss was an essential aspect of Wolfsburg going forward last

Arjen Robben [Bayern Munich]: The winger only gets better with age, cementing himself into Bayern Munich folklore last season. His importance had been especially evident when he was absent. Granit Xhaka [Borussia Monchengladbach]: Borussia Monchengladbach's midfield orchestrator brought them up back into the Champions League

berths. The glue that held the

Foals together throughout. Kevin De Bruyne [Wolfsburg]: A breakthrough season established the young Belgian as the Bundesliga's best. Will take his talents to the bigger stage of the Champions League next term. Son Heung-Min [Bayer Leverkusen]: The Korean wideman was a revelation, netting 11 times - including a marvelous hat-trick against Wolfsburg - as Leverkusen finished in fourth Thomas Muller [Bayern Munich]: Bayern Munich's Raumdeuter needs to find space in his trophy cabinet for another Bundesliga medal, after playing an instrumental role with 13 goals. Alexander Meier [Eintracht Frankfurt]: Eintracht Frankfurt's leading scorer of the past four seasons also emerged as Germany's top marksman last season, putting 19 goals away in just 26 games. Robert Lewandowski [Bayern

Munich]: The prolific Pole settled into Bayern Munich colours slowly but surely, with his decisive performances vital in his new team clinching their third consecutive Bundesliga.

MOST KEEPER WINS

Manuel Neuer Diego Benaglio Yann Sommer Bernd Leno Oliver Baumann Marwin Hitz	Bayern Wolfsburg Mönchengladbach Bayer O4 Hoffenheim FC Augsburg	23 20 19 17 12
Roman Weidenfeller Ralf Fahrmann Ron Zieler Loris Karius Thomas Kraft Raphael Wolf Timo Horn Sven Ulreich Roman Burki Lukas Kruse Kevin Trapp Jaroslav Drobny Alex Manninger Felix Wiedwald	Dortmund FC Schalke 04 Hannover 96 1. FSV Mainz 05 Hertha Berlin Werder Bremen 1. FC Köln VfB Stuttgart SC Freiburg Paderborn Frankfurt Hamburger SV FC Augsburg Frankfurt	10 10 9 9 9 9 7 7 6 6 5 5
- 122		_



PLAYER		C
Manuel Neuer	Bayern	20
Bernd Leno	Bayer 04	16
Yann Sommer	Mönchengladbach	15
Timo Horn	1. FC Köln	13
Loris Karius	1. FSV Mainz 05	10
Marwin Hitz	FC Augsburg	9
Thomas Kraft	Hertha Berlin	9
Roman Burki	SC Freiburg	9
Oliver Baumann	Hoffenheim	8
Jaroslav Drobny	Hamburger SV	8
Ralf Fahrmann	FC Schalke 04	8
Diego Benaglio	Wolfsburg	8
Ron Zieler	Hannover 96	7
Roman Weidenfeller	Dortmund	7
Lukas Kruse	Paderborn	6
Raphael Wolf	Werder Bremen	5
Kevin Trapp	Frankfurt	5
Sven Ulreich	VfB Stuttgart	5
Mitchell Langerak	Dortmund	3
Koen Casteels	Werder Bremen	2







END of an ERA

"HE'S **LEAVING** BECAUSE HE'S **GUARDIOLA'S** FAVOURITE. IF IT'S **ANYONE'S FAULT. IT'S** MINE, I **CAN'T MAKE MYSELF SHORTER AND LEARN SPANISH.**"

The Borussia Dortmund CEO placed his utmost faith in Jurgen Klopp and claims he can imagine the 48-year old one day returning to the club in some capacity.

The departing Coach put Borussia Dortmund firmly back on the map following only one Bundesliga title win in an 11-year spell before

ow the tables have turned. The very thought of Borussia Dortmund without highly-rated head Coach Jurgen Klopp once belonged to the realms of fantasy. They seemed inseparable during a tumultuous rollercoaster ride that delivered one of the outstanding periods in the club's history - and probably the most eventful. Early signs were promising when a sixth spot at the end of his first campaign was followed by Europa League qualification in his second. Dortmund were making definite strides having finished 13th under Thomas Doll prior to Klopp's arrival, while displaying a new-found vigour under their animated Coach.

Die Schwarzgelben recruited ingeniously to inject vibrancy into a tired squad. Bargains were sought in the shape of attacking midfielder Shinji Kagawa, striker Robert Lewandowski and rightback Lukasz Piszczek. All three were viewed as back-up players initially, but both Kagawa and Piszczek became mainstays. Meanwhile, Lewandowski proved a valuable asset from the bench when notching eight goals, and that season also saw the rise to prominence of Mario

Paraguayan Lucas Barrios top-scored with 16 League strikes as Borussia ran away with a seventh top-flight title. They saw off closest rivals Bayer Leverkusen by seven points, whilst Bayern lagged 10 adrift in third. Furthermore, Dortmund beat Bayern away from home for the first time in 19 years

Klopp's abundant passion was evident on the touchline, which nurtured a powerful bond between Coach and supporters. He couldn't hide his emotions - kicking every ball from the sidelines, and celebrating goals as furiously as those adoring fans. Charismatic and disarmingly charming, the once-unheralded former Mainz boss was the new darling of German football. His popularity could scarcely increase. That was until BVB secured a celebrated League and Cup double with a sublime 5-2 triumph over Bayern in the DFB-Pokal Final a year later to rubberstamp their domestic superiority. Crucially, Lewandowski cemented a starting spot in hitting 22 League goals on the way to an eight-point advantage at the top.

A third Bundesliga shield in succession proved a step too far, as Bayern fought back to take the spoils by a massive 25-point margin ahead of the dethroned kings. But, that heavy blow was softened by their simultaneous run to the 2013 Champions League Final. Dortmund surprisingly topped a tough group containing Real Madrid, Ajax and Manchester City, prior to knockout victories over Shakhtar Donetsk, Malaga and earlier foes Real to reach the Wembley showpiece - against Bayern.

An admirable never-say-die attitude was epitomised by two injury-time goals at home to Malaga in the dying embers of a quarter-final second leg that almost saw their demise. Real Madrid were then demolished 4-1 in the first

Borussia Dortmund's Jurgen Klopp appeared untouchable when leading his team out at the 2013 Champions League Final. Two years on, the Coach has relinquished his post having flirted with relegation from the Bundesliga. David Lee Wheatley looks back at the highs and lows of his time in charge.







Klopp **ERA** 2008-2015

Bundesliga Champs

> 2 2011, 2012

German Cup

1

Champions League Runners Up

Klopp will be missed by fans and players.

leg of a crackling semi-final tie, thus rendering meaningless a subsequent 2-0 return victory for the Spanish giants.

BVB disappointingly ran out of steam in the all-German spectacle, won 2-1 by the treble-winning Bavarians thanks to a late Arjen Robben effort. Klopp consoled his shattered players on the hallowed turf, all too aware he was about to lose injured midfielder Mario Gotze to his nemesis. "He's leaving because he's Guardiola's favourite. If it's anyone's fault, it's mine. I can't make myself shorter and learn Spanish," was Klopp's typically self-deprecating reaction when unhelpful confirmation of Gotze's impending departure broke a month before the final.

Despite a strong start to the new term, fitness problems severely hampered efforts to get closer to their perennial arch-rivals. They only reached the quarter-finals of the Champions League, having topped Group F above Arsenal. In the run-up to a November clash at the Emirates, Klopp succinctly described his preferred style of play in comparison with that of Gunners counterpart Arsene Wenger.

"He likes having the ball, playing football, passes - it's like an orchestra," the Dortmund supremo said, while playing an imaginary violin. "But it's a silent song, yeah? I like heavy metal."

Unfortunately, his team weren't in tune when trailing 19 points behind champions Bayern, while 20-goal striker Lewandowski was the next player off the conveyor belt leading directly to Munich. A 2-0 Cup final loss to their arch-enemies left a burning question hanging ominously in the air – where would Borussia go from there? The shocking answer was into spiralling.

uncontrollable decline far exceeding anything predicted or imagined. An all-action Dortmund side renowned for their exciting approach suddenly appeared devoid of ideas. Die Borussen hit rock-bottom following the winter break and were entrenched in the bottom-three from Matchdays 15 to 20. It was harrowing for fans to witness their beloved club languishing in the relegation mire, under a much-vaunted Coach who appeared vulnerable for the first time. German international Marco Reus, consistently linked with a switch elsewhere, handed everyone a timely boost when signing a new deal until 2019. Mercifully, the team recovered on the back of that lift to bring a measure of respectability to proceedings, but it wasn't convincing enough for Klopp. The 47-year-old announced his intention to step down, insisting he was no longer the man to take the club forward.

"I always said in that moment where I believe I am not the perfect Coach anymore for this extraordinary club, I will say so," explained an emotional Klopp at a Press conference arranged to confirm the news.

"I really think the decision is the right one. This club deserves to be coached from the 100 per cent right Coach."

Taking over a team in urgent need of renovation, he developed numerous footballers of world-class repute in the act of entirely revitalising Dortmund's fortunes. Klopp also had the temerity to challenge mighty Bayern Munich – and won. The departing boss leaves behind a financially stable outfit in possession of a squad bursting with potential, while providing great memories that collectively serve as irrefutable proof of precisely what can be achieved when everyone connected with the club works tirelessly towards a common goal.

Should the 'Yellow Wall' continue in that same vein, there'll be no need to fear for the future.



"CHARISMATIC
AND
DISARMINGLY
CHARMING,
THE ONCEUNHERALDED
FORMER
MAINZ BOSS
WAS THE NEW
DARLING
OF GERMAN
FOOTBALL"

SUPPORTER FRIENDLY

Borussia Dortmund can boast regular attendances of around 80,000 people at home games, and that connection to their fans has endured throughout even the lowest points. In recognition of their fantastic support, the powers-that-be continually maintain affordable rates to watch the action, which was as low as €204 for a standing place and from €376 to sit at the beginning of this season.

The club's Christmas party in 2014 – attended by over 1,000 fan-group members – also illustrated a unique bond between the footballing squad and those who worship them. Players spent over two-and-a-half hours signing autographs and ended the evening pulling pints of beer for thirsty supporters by way of apology for an awful campaign. That incredible level of integrity simply isn't prevalent at most professional clubs and showed a true touch of class from all invelved.

When Dortmund dropped to bottom place in the Bundesliga following the winter break, deeply disappointed followers could be forgiven for becoming upset at the scene unfurling in front of their eyes.

A first-ever loss to Augsburg, who were down to 10 men, led to hitherto unheard of jeering from the frustrated crowd. At the final whistle, goalkeeper Roman Weidenfeller approached unhappy fans in an attempt to calm the situation. He listened intently to one critic, before climbing the perimeter fence in order to communicate directly to a significantly vocal group. Central defender Mats Hummels also spoke with disgruntled supporters, one of whom stuck his arm through a gap to embrace the club captain.



Above.
Dortmund's famously fanatical support in celebration of yet another important victory.

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS

Thomas Tuchel is a man with very big shoes to fill at Borussia Dortmund, but he can take solace in several striking similarities between his own burgeoning coaching career and that of Jurgen Klopp as he settles in at Signal Iduna Park.

Neither enjoyed sparkling playing spells at the top level when plying their trade as imposing central defenders lower down the divisions. However, Klopp made many more appearances in his time and initially started out as an attacker before moving backwards. The pair took the exact same route to Dortmund's Westfalenstadion directly from Mainz, where Tuchel spent five years coaching an outfit previously led by Klopp over the course of seven seasons. Former Stuttgart Kickers and Ulm player Tuchel left his role with Augsburg's second team initially to take on the Mainz Under-19 side, before graduating to the first-team set-up. He took Die Nullfunfer to ninth, prior to Europa League qualification via fifth spot during the following campaign. Klopp had earlier defied the odds to take Mainz into

Europe whilst in charge.
Their age on arrival at Borussia is also very close – Klopp was one month shy of his 41st birthday when accepting the post and Tuchel will be 42 in August of this year.

Taking over from a living legend in the form of Klopp certainly won't be easy, yet rather than be daunted by the task, he should instead take inspiration from the path taken by his predecessor in the hope of emulating his success



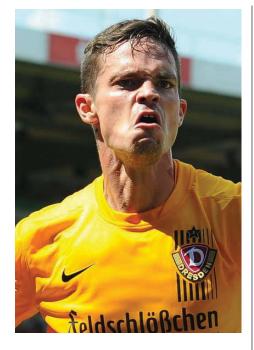


AROUND THE BUNDESLIGA



IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...TRY, TRY, AGAIN...

even if it takes you over 30 years! That is exactly what SV Darmstadt 98 achieved by defeating St... Pauli 1-0 to finally make a return to Germany's top football flight after a 33-year absence.



LAW AND ORDER...

Fouls are the order of the day in football. However, Dynamo Dresden defender Dennis Erdmann's foul on Dortmund star Marco Reus could have cost him more than just a suspension after police actually got involved. This was because the off-the-ball incident was perceived as 'malicious' as opposed to a mere 'sporting challenge' and Dresden police were prepared to charge him with GBH (grievous bodily harm) only for Reus to decline to press charges.

scored in the 2014-15
Bundesliga campaign,
ch is 124 fewer than the 2013-14 edition.

However, both this season and the prior one saw the exact same number of home - 145 - recorded among the 18 teams in

Meanwhile, only 79 road wins were earned, which is the fewest since the 2005-06 Bundesliga

Runners up Wolfsburg netted an impressive 17 goals in their first 15 minutes of their League games during the 2014-15 term - the most efficient out of any other team in Germany's top flight.

Their 69 points earned are also the most since their impressive Bundesliga-winning campaign from the 2008-09 season.

THE NUMBERS

this season's Bundesliga top marksman, Eintracht Frankfurt forward Alexander Meier....

League matches due to a six-week injury lay-off following knee surgery.



HENNES REALLY NOT AMUSED

FC Köln striker Anthony Ujah simply cannot avoid controversy. The Nigerian, who was involved in an odd celebration with the club mascot a while back managed to ruffle feathers (and probably irk poor Hennes yet again) by posting a photo of himself with new club Werder Bremen. Mind you, this was well before the season concluded and his team's top flight status was secured - and not surprisingly, he left the pitch in tears after being booed and jeered by supporters miffed by his ungrateful attitude.

UNCHARTERED TERRITORY

What a season it has been for Augsburg. Four years ago, they were in the 2. Bundesliga and after an impressive campaign they are in the Europa League for the first time in the club's history. As they now begin to navigate through unfamiliar terrain, what will we see next season from this team who only made their Bundesliga debut back in 2011?



LIVING DANGEROUSLY

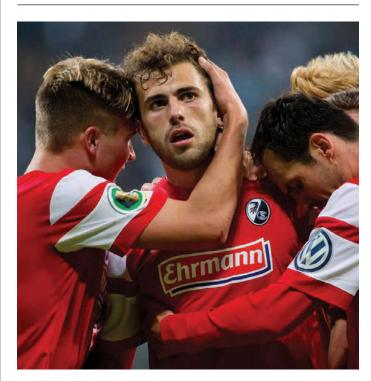
Despite their shockingly bad season, Hamburg fans can still boast about the one thing their club has over ever other one in Germany - yes including Bayern Munich - Die Rothosen have been never relegated to the second tier. A 2-0 win over Schalke on the final matchday was enough to give them a lifeline in the form of a relegation play-off versus Karlsruher SC.





BAD CASE OF DÉJÀVU

For the second straight season, Hamburg will again have to roll the dice in the relegation play-offs. No other team in Germany's top flight has to endure this, with only fellow top-tier side Eintracht Frankfurt enjoying the dubious honour of having been in this unenviable position twice.



ONE TO TELL THE GRANDKIDS?

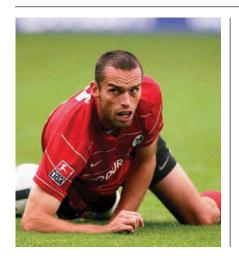
On May 16, Bayern Munich lost their fifth match of the season to Freiburg. However, for their opponents, one goal-scorer, Admir Mehmedi netted one to remember. Why? Well, according to Opta, he became the second player to 'score from distance' against Manuel Neuer in a competitive fixture this season. The first? None other than that exquisite chip by Lionel Messi as Barcelona defeated them 3-0.

....only two players, Franck Ribéry (Bayern Munich in 2012-13) and Zvjezdan Misimović (Wolfsburg in 2008-09) have been able to match this in the League's history.

GOOD WHILST IT LASTED

At the start of this season, Paderborn fans could hardly believe their luck. Thanks to a 2-1 win over Aalen in May 2014, their squad had secured promotion to the Bundesliga for the first time in their history. But unfortunately it would prove to be a one-season wonder as they were, not surprisingly, no match for the top flight and will again return to the 2. Bundesliga for the 2015-16 season.





DID YOU KNOW?

League title this season, Bayern Munich only conceded 18 goals. The last time they did this? During the 2012-13 campaign...when they made history and clinched the much-coveted Treble.

In addition, the 22 clean sheets kept by Die Roten in this year's Bundesliga has now surpassed the record of 21 set back during that same massively successful 2012/2013 season.

Manuel Neuer was responsible for 20 of those clean sheets, a new goalkeeping record.

A NIGHTMARE CONCLUSION

Surely, this is not how Freiburg defender Pavel Krmas would have wanted to conclude his footballing career in Germany. But the beautiful game indeed can be cruel. The 35-year-old, in his final game for Freiburg, netted a goal in his 100th appearance - except it was an own goal that effectively condemned his team to the second-tier for next season.

UNLUCKY NUMBER 11

11 proved to be a double-edged (numerical) sword for Frankfurt. Whilst they managed to avoid a loss in their last 11 home games (seven wins, four draws) - their best ever record in 15 years - they somehow could not replicate this form on the road. In fact, Die Adler were unable to win any of their last 11 away matches.

DID YOU KNOW

Werder Bremen has the worst luck when it comes to playing Dortmund. Not only did their 3-2 reversal mark the fifth straight year that they lost their final League game, but also was their eighth successive loss to BVB - the worst ever results on the road against the same team.

A TALE OF TWO **HALVES**

Dortmund fans must surely be wishing their team could have re-discovered their form earlier. In the first half of the season, Die Schwarzgelben had earned just 15 points. After the Christmas break, they had racked up over double that, with 31, going from relegation candidates to Europa League competitors in the span of months. Surely, one would be hard pressed to find a better comeback story in this season's domestic campaign.





ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE

If Dortmund came back refreshed and raring to go after the winter hiatus, their bitter rivals Schalke appeared to have decided to extend their holiday. Despite impressing in Europe namely nearly knocking Real Madrid out of the Champions League - Die Königsblauen were maddeningly disappointing for large spells. An impressive draw with Bayern at the Allianz Aside, Roberto Di Matteo's men failed to win a single game on the road in the second half of the season, concluding with a shock loss to Hamburg on the final matchday.





KLOPP EXCITED

The former Borussia Dortmund manager is open to a move to the Premier League but he'd prefer to work at a club with a sporting director, which would be similar to his profile at Dortmund. His agent, Marc Kosicke, also revealed that Klopp finds the English league very exciting mainly due to the immense competition between the clubs.



PODOLSKI WANTS IN

Lucas Podolski had fallen out of favor at the Emirates and was loaned out to Inter Milan last year. The 30-year-old failed to impress in the Serie A and is set to return back to London to complete his last year at Arsenal. The former Cologne player has revealed that he'd be happy to help Wenger's attacking line if they require his services.



AROUND THE BUNDESLIGA

MAKING HISTORY

Chelsea must be kicking themselves for selling Kevin De Bruyne, who went on to have an absolutely dazzling and spectacular season with Wolfsburg. De Bruyne recorded 21 assists, the most ever in a single Bundesliga season, and won the league's Player of the Season title for it.





BY THE GRACE OF...GOAL DIFFERENCE

Three teams lost 17 times, or 50 per cent of their matches this season - Hertha Berlin, Hamburg, and Paderborn. One has been relegated, whilst one will have to fight for survival in the play-off rounds. Meanwhile, Hertha Berlin are comfortably secure in the top flight for yet another season? Why? Thankfully, due to their nine-goal advantage over Hamburg, whose case was definitely not helped by shipping eight goals unanswered against Bayern back on February 14.

BAYERN CELEBRATE IN STYLE

The season is over, and Bayern Munich has lifted the Bundesliga trophy for the 25th time! Surprise, surprise, right? It was all business as usual for Bayern, who celebrated the victory by undergoing the time-honoured tradition of soaking the coach with drinks. Only, Bayern's players didn't reach for the Gatorade, instead, drenching Pep Guardiola with massive pints of German beer!



only side in the Bundesliga not to draw a single match on the road in their 17 games

WHERE NEXT?

So, what does the future hold for Klopp? Some reports say he will take over at Bayern Munich or Liverpool. Klopp has said he would also want to take time off from managing for a little while. But he's not going to Istanbul, as was rumoured on social media. Klopp responded, saying: "You don't have to believe every dumba** who tweets something. I wasn't in Istanbul. Every bit of me is here.

"IF BAYERN MUNICH ARE LOOKING FOR A MANAGER THAT HAS TO WIN THE TREBLE EACH YEAR. THEN I'M NOT THE ONE. I'M NOT **GOOD ENOUGH."**

- Bayern manager Pep Guardiola reflects on a season with just the one title, the

Robben meets his new striking partner for next season.

ADDRESSING THE CRITICS

Arien Robben missed the last few games with an injury. but was still named Bayern Munich's player of the season. And, in an effort to curb some of his detractors, who say he's a one-trick pony, Robben told reporters otherwise, explaining, "It is very important that your actions always have an element of surprise," adding ""I have added a certain variation to my game. I will not cut inside all the time, but I will not try to pass my opponent on the outside all the time, either." We'll have to see it to believe it,

MISSED IT BY A **HAIR**

German outfit Hamburg SV nearly made history themselves, though for all the wrong reasons. Hamburger SV is the one German club never to have been relegated from the Bundesliga, and narrowly avoided the drop with a lastgame come-from-behind win over Karlsruhe to keep afloat... for now!

NO THANK YOU

Borussia Dortmund centerback Mats Hummels has been a target of Manchester United manager Louis Van Gaal for some time now, but the German defender has put his foot down ahead of the summer window, saying he wants to stay with Dortmund for next



DID YOU KNOW?

It was a curious case of déjà vu for Bayer Leverkusen, who accumulated 61 points this season, earning them fourth spot. This is exactly the same place and points total they gained in their last

In drawing 2-2 with Wolfsburg (their 13th overall stalemate) on this season's final game-day, Köln managed to match a 23-yearold record of making it 10 games at home without a loss (seven draws and three wins)

TURNAROUND TEAM

Four years ago, Borussia Monchengladbach was on the verge of being relegated. Four years on, the team's fortunes changed with the appointment of a new manager, Lucien Favre. It worked, and the team qualified for a Champions League spot at the end of the season, finishing third overall. Talk about a turnaround!

CALLING IT A DAY

Borussia Dortmund manager Jurgen Klopp is stepping away from the team he loves. Klopp announced he would be departing the club he joined in 2008. BVB started horribly, then turned it all around and finished seventh this season, Klopp will forever remain a fan-favourite figure, and news of his decision was met with many tributes, thank you's and nothing

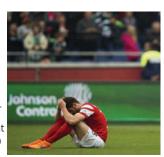


SPEAKING OF RELEGATION

Stuttgart also survived a relegation scare, thanks to a bit of genius by manager Huub Stevens, who called his team a bunch of monkeys in training. His players responded in kind, scoring a game-winning goal that saved their team and celebrating by monkeying around, literally, impersonating a bunch of apes with smiles on their faces.

NIGHTMARE DROP

While Hamburger and Stuttgart celebrate avoiding the drop, Freiburg, unfortunately, did not. Freiburg went into their last game of the season needing a win to survive. And, 35 year-old Czech defender Pavel Krmas was playing his last game for the team. Rather than playing hero on the day, though, Krmas scored an own goal that cost his team the game and sunk them to the second divison. Ouch!



"I WOULD NOT RETURN TO CHELSEA AS LONG AS [MOURINHO] IS IN CHARGE. I KNOW THAT I LIKE THE BUNDESLIGA. AND IT ALWAYS DID ME GOOD. I DON'T FEAR TO RETURN TO ENGLAND, OR PLAY IN SPAIN. I BELIEVE I CAN MAKE IT THERE. YOU CAN'T COMPARE MY TIME AT CHELSEA WITH

Kevin De Bruyne rules out a Chelsea return.



SAID, DONE.









only a matter of inches between the countries giants, PSG, Olympique de Lyonnais, Monaco and Olympique de Marseille. The mighty capital outfit finished the season eight points clear of Hubert Fournier's Lyon. But with context to the tale, it was surely not the simplest of victories for Laurent Blanc's men.

Runners up, Lyon, are best known in Europe for their dominant reign seven years in a row between 2000-2008. Since then the club has stayed afloat in top flight football but without the grave impact they made years prior. As PSG emerged in the eye of the Qatari sports investment only three years ago, the gap between the French elite and French mundane has became collosal.

This changed in the 2014/2015 season and it wasn't due to an injection of money, but an injection of grit and heart. Lyon's resurgence which saw them battle the mega Capital came from a ripe crop of young talent gracing the Ligue 1 pitch. Player of the Year Alexandre Lacazette and Young Player of the Year, Nabil Fekir are the at the forefront of this example. The world of football was marvelled at Lyon product Lacazette this past season. Individually his triumph was heavily awarded and he finished as the leagues top scorer with 27 goals to third place contestant, Zlatan Ibrahimovic's 19. Compare this feat with Ibrahimovic's 30 goals in his debut season with PSG and 26 in 2014 and it is clear to see how assorted the leagues leaders have become. Of course what should be taken into account is Ibrahimovic's season long

WAS ONLY A MATTER OF INCHES BETWEEN THE COUNTRIES GIANTS"

PSG celebrate winning Ligue 1 again

Right

Despite Injuries. Zlatan Ibrahimovic still managed to score 19 goals. He was an essential part to his team's success

is the comparison, as the clubs financial flex across Europe has brought them a domestic quadruple, but with a heavy amount of turmoil along the way. This is their weakness - money cannot solve all problems. Blanc's men pushed through a season plaqued with injuries such as the continual absence of talisman Zlatan Ibrahimovic and internal unrest within the squad. These obstacles are what forced PSG into times of uncertainty, such as their disaster 4-2 loss to Bastia at the turn of the year. For example, in the 2012/2013 season PSG lifted the title with a whopping 16 points between themselves and current runner-ups Lyon who finished in third that year. That staple is an example of the growth in France in the last two years - although PSG can win titles with the inflation of money, Lyon can contend for them with internal growth. The worry for PSG did not stop at rivals Lyon, but continued with Monaco and Marseille. Marcelo Bielsa's dawn into France

was an impactful one forcing Marseille back into the spotlight. His tactics brought the best out of an otherwise forgotten, Andre-Pierre Gignac, Andre Ayew, Dimitri Payet and Michy Batshuayi who are all now players fancied by clubs abroad for their performances. Despite player success, all did not stay well at the Stade Velodrome. The Argentine's final matches with OM were a dreadful display of the dream he built in the beginning of the campaign. By the end of the season the club finished in fourth two points behind Monaco with a 5-3 nightmare loss at the Velodrome to Lorient steering their title hopes to shambles and fans out the door. Yet what stavs memorable is the atmosphere and culture that Bielsea re-introduced to the most decorated club in French football. He did not achieve the trophies the Velodrome hoped for but he surely instilled belief.

While Marseille faltered, Monaco fought heavily for their Champions League dignity in a much less embarrassing fashion than PSG. Leonardo Jardim's situation at the club became vastly different than the year before because of the loss of some of the club's most valued players. Unfortunately to add to the Riviera sides departure list is Stade Louis II King, Dimitar Berbatov who was released by the club in June. These losses and others could preface either a resurgence or collapse for Monaco come the 2015/2016 season. Yet considering their gritty fight in Europe and third place finish this season the club's determination remains unchanged. In retrospect, despite the struggle for the title among the countries favourites, PSG walks among these clubs superior thanks to the history made in their domestic treble. The Lique 1 title. Coupe de la Ligue and their first Coupe de France in close to five years is a brilliant feat to







RUNNERS UP



Lvon: The Olympic side have claimed the Lique 1 title seven times all within a consecutive period. They averaged 1.97 goals per game this season and saw their coach Hubert Fournier become nominated for Coach of the Year in 2015 for his efforts.



Monaco: The Riviera side suffered an onslaught of draws that saw them emerge as title threats closer to the end of their campaign. Manager Leonardo Jardim was a shocking omission from the UNFP's Coach Of The Year nominees considering how he lead the club through adversity to the Champions League quarterfinals and third place in Ligue 1.



Marseille: The clubs opened their campaign with a victory and a loss, but in spite of the loss Bielsa's men went onto sustain an eight game win streak between August-October. Andre-Pierre Gignac scored in six of those appearances finishing the season with 21 goals to his tally.



LEAGUE TABLE

16	:AM	W	D	_	PIS
Pa	aris SG	24	11	3	83
Ly	on	22	9	7	75
Mo	onaco	20	11	7	71
Ma	arseille	21	6	11	69
AS	SSE	19	12	7	69
В	ordeaux	17	12	9	63
Mo	ontpellier	16	8	14	56
Lil	lle	16	8	14	56
Re	ennes	13	11	14	50
Gı	uingamp	15	4	19	49
0	GC Nice	13	9	16	48
Ba	astia	12	11	15	47
Ca	aen	12	10	16	46
Na	antes	11	12	15	45
St	ade Reims	12	8	18	44
Lo	orient	12	7	19	43
To	oulouse	12	6	20	42
Е٧	vian 💮 💮	11	4	23	37
Me	etz	7	9	22	30
Le	ens	7	8	23	29

Qualified for 2015-16 Champions League

Qualified for 2015-16 Europa League

Europa League

TOP GOALSCORERS

PLAYER

Alexandre Lacazette Andre-Pierre Gignac Zlatan Ibrahimovic Edinson Cavani Max Gradel Claudio Beauvue Diego Rolan Wissam Ben Yedder Nabil Fekir Jordan Avew Lucas Barrios Christophe Mandanne Andre Ayew Carlos Eduardo Mathieu Duhamel Paul-Georges Ntep Wahbi Khazri Michy Batshuayi **Anthony Martial** Nolan Roux

27 Lvon Marseille 21 PSG 19 PSG 18 17 St Etienne 17 Guingamp 15 Bordeaux Toulouse 14 13 12 Lyon Lorient 11 Montpellier Guingamp 11 Marseille 10 10 Nice **ETG** 10 Stade Rennes Bordeaux 9 Marseille 9 AS Monaco 9

MOST ASSISTS

PLAYER

Dimitri Payet Javier Pastore Yannick Ferreira Nabil Fekir Romain Hamouma Marco Verratti Diego Jérémy Pied Anthony Mounier Clinton Mua Njie Zlatan Ibrahimovic Aleksandar Pesic Alassane Plea Jordan Veretout Sofiane Boufal Alexandre Lacazette Jordan Ferri João Moutinho Paul-Georges Ntep Adrien Regattin

G 17 Marseille PSG 12 AS Monaco 10 Lvon 9 St Etienne 8 PSG Stade de Reims 8 Guingamp Montpellier Lyon PSG 6 Toulouse 6 6 Nice 6 Nantes Lille Lyon 6 Lyon 6 AS Monaco 6 Stade Rennes Toulouse

TOTAL **LEAGUE GOALS**

MATCH

GOALS

PER



ONE ON ONE

BRAHIMOVIC

By Lauren Maharaj

It is uncertain that football will ever see a figure such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic again. He has a formidable presence against defensive lines. He owns a frame shaped to athletic perfection. His leadership is one of his finest assets. His marksmanship in front of goal is decorated with precision and unpredictability. At 33 years of age, it does not seem like his teenage desire to be the absolute best is fading. Instead, since joining Paris Saint-Germain he has only further proven how incredibly talented he is among the elite of the modern game. Ibrahimovic will be approaching his fourth year with PSG this upcoming season, which will be one of the longest spells of his career under one banner. It is fair to say that upon his arrival in Paris, the inflation of the club grew to new heights and he single-handily aided in achieving this status. He is the clubs newest talisman, one who will be undisputed in time and one who has forced Pauleta - PSG's former legend - off his pedestal. In a mere three seasons at 124 appearances, Ibrahimovic is only three goals away from topping Pauleta's all-time PSG scoring record of 109 goals in 211 appearances. The difference in brilliance lies in the numbers. For Pauleta it took close to five years in 211 appearances to achieve this feat. For Ibrahmovic, it has taken only 124 appearances over the course of three seasons to now be only inches away from forever cementing himself into the Capital club's history. If individually the Swede could not be historic enough, he can also boast leading the club to their magnificent quadruple in 2014/2015 season by winning the Trophee des Champions, Coupe de la Ligue, Coupe de France and Ligue 1 title for the third year in a row.



You have just won your 12th league title in 14 seasons; does it still feel as special?

Yes of course it does, when you get bored of winning Championships, then you have become bored of the game. If I ever felt like that I would know it would be time to retire.

In the end you won Ligue 1 fairly comfortably, is it getting a little easy for PSG?

I don't think so; we played very well so we ended up winning it with games to go. That is the problem of other teams that they let us win it, not ours.

You are one of the greatest players of the generation, but still the Champions League evades you, how frustrating is it?

I want to win it, but I don't feel like I need to win it to prove anything. If you have look at all I have achieved, I don't have anything to prove to anybody – but it is a title I still dream of winning, but because I want to win it for me.

You made the quarter finals this season, how close are PSG to winning it?

Very close. This season we knocked out Chelsea who went on to become the Champions of England, and it is never easy to beat a Jose Mourinho team, especially over two legs. We are as good as anybody on our day, so next season we will have a good a chance as anybody.

What do PSG need to do to go that bit further in Europe next season?

Quality wise we are there, but like anything in football you just need that little bit of luck sometimes.

At the start of the season PSG broke the world record fee for a defender. How would you sum up David Luiz's season?

Very good, he cost that sum because he is one of the best defenders in the world – it is that simple.

You were not top scorer in Ligue 1 this season, does that bother you?

Nobody remembers personal records; does the top scorer have a Championship medal?

PSG have a lot of South American players who will be playing in the Copa America, is there a danger of fatigue next season for them?

No, I am sure they will be given the right time off to relax after the tournament. Every player wants to represent their country, and it is no different in the Copa America.

Do you expect PSG to have another busy summer in the transfer market?

Only the coach and owners will know that, but I think it is clear the big project the owners have for this club from all the money they have invested, so quality signings would not surprise me.

What does the summer hold for Zlatan? I will go on vacation with my family, then it will be back to training as we prepare for another successful season.





DID YOU KNOW

Ibrahimovic became the only footballer in history to score for 6 different clubs in the Champions League when he put away a penalty in PSG's 4-1 win over Dynamo Kiev back in 2012. He has also scored for Ajax, Juventus, Inter Milan, Barcelona and AC Milan in the competition.

The Swedish superstar has always terrified opposition defences, but it isn't just his footballing skills that make him so frightening. Ibrahimovic has also been a black-belt in taekwondo since the age of 17, and in 2010 he was given an honorary black belt by the Italian national taekwondo team.

In 2007 sportswear giants Nike decided to upgrade the 5-a-side football pitch outside Ibrahimovic's childhood home, where he frequently played as a youngster. The pitch was renamed 'Zlatan Court' and bears the quote "Here is my heart. Here is my story. .. Here is my play. Take it further. Zlatan."

At the age of 33, most strikers are beginning to reach the end of their career. However, lbrahimovic's goalscoring feats appear to be far from the end. The Swedish international has scored more than 30 goals in each of the last 4 seasons, including a 41 goal return in 2013/14.

At the age of 10, Ibrahimovic was brought on as a substitute during a FBK Balkan youth age. The side were trailing 5-0 until the youngster scored an unbelievable 8 goals during the second half of the game, single-handedly securing the club an 8-5 victory.

Shortly after Sweden failed to qualify for the later stages of the 2014 World Cup, as the Xbox One ambassador for France, Ibrahimovic surprised his Paris Saint-Germain team-mates with their own personalised Xbox gaming consoles, complete with their names, numbers and his signature.

The Paris Saint-Germain front-man is such an inspiring figure in Sweden, both on and off the pitch, that he has picked up the Guldbollen, or Swedish footballer of the year award, 9 times in the past 10 years, 8 of which have come consecutively since Freddie Ljunberg's 2006 win.

Neither of Ibrahimovic's parents were actually born in Sweden. His father is Bosnian and his mother is Croatian, but they immigrated to Sweden before Zlatan was born, meaning that he had the choice between playing for Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Croatia.

The Swedish national dictionary contains the term "To Zlatan", a phrase taken from the Swede's personal slogan 'Dare to Zlatan', which means to dominate or complete a task with extreme talent. The phrase has since gone global, and is now widely used by football fans across Europe.

Ibrahimovic ranks as the most expensive player in history when it comes to the total combined amount that clubs have spent on transfer fees to land his signature. The PSG front-man has raked up a mammoth €171 million in transfer fees following a number of bia money moves



STRIKER PARTIERS HIPS IN THE MLS

Major League Soccer has seen plenty of great forwards in its day: whether it's the old guard of Taylor Twellman, Brian Ching, Landon Donovan Dwayne De Rosario and Preki, or the new generation of Jozy Altidore, Obafemi Martins, Dom Dwyer and Chris Wondolowski, the MLS is a hunting ground for some of the most prolific goalscorers and characters in the game. But, strikers, like shoes, often come in pairs, and while one center forward is the preference for the game today, often at the top of a 4-2-3-1 or some deviation of it, the two-striker system remains the most efficient in MLS. So, which striker partnership reigns supreme among them? Let's have a look at some of the best dynamic duos, past and present, in Major League Soccer:



"GIOVINCO
AND
ALTIDORE
COULD
VERY WELL
DEVELOP
INTO THE
MOST
RUTHLESS
AND
DANGEROUS
OF ALL TIME."





JOAO PLATA AND **ALVARO SABORIO REAL SALT LAKE**

It was once beautiful, seeing the tiny Joao Plata whip in perfect crosses for Saborio to bury home. It worked, too, as they combined for more than 20 goals. But Plata broke his leg and this RSL duo petered away at the start of the new season. Three months on, Plata is back! So, expect this duo to flourish once more as RSL gather themselves once more with these two up top.

WILL BRUIN AND **GILES BARNES HOUSTON DYNAMO**

They're big, fast and they've given is a more traditional absolute workhorse. They combined for 21 goals together in freely in 2015, too. These two share the most physically dominating partnership in the league, bar none.

strong, and together, Houston a new look up top: while Bruin forward, Barnes is an 2014 and are scoring

MIKE MAGEE AND AMARIKWA

CHICAGO FIRE This combination wasn't supposed to be as effective as it was, with Amarikwa coming out of left field and scoring in the double digits in 2014. Magee, a Chicago native, came home and created magic, but an injury has kept him out of the line up in 2015, so this twosome hasn't had a chance to play this season.

QUAKER

bhpbilliton **bhp**billita

JUAN AGUDELO AND CHARLIE DAVIES **NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION**

Agudelo and Davies are both fringe forwards for the U.S. national team but they've found their feet in New England and have benefitted for it; with help from the ever-dominant Lee Nguyen behind them, these two new partners up top have shown an ability to combine and score, so the potential is there: keep an eye out for these two in 2015!

Besides these current combinations, some of the best strike partnerships in MLS include some of the biggest names in football, too: There's Landon Donovan and Robbie Keane, who, together, won three MLS Cups. Keane and Donovan were used in so many different combinations together throughout the field, but whether they were close together or spread far apart, the two always managed to find each other with the ball. While Donovan was eventually moved over to the right wing, he and Keane combined time and time again, in tandem with David Beckham, Mike Magee and Alan Gordon. Speaking of Gordon, we can't forget the San Jose Earthquakes' dynamic duo: the Bash Brothers, Steven Lenhart and Alan Gordon were fast friends on and off the field and created a bit of a social media following to go alongside their regular scoring form. These two knew how to charm a crowd, and were a fan-favourite duo in MLS. But, most notable of all is New York Red Bull duo Bradley Wright-Phillips and Thierry Henry; together, they combined for goals galore, with Wright-Phillips tying the all-time most goals in a single season (27) in 2014. Henry, turned provider, racked up assists instead of goals before retiring at the end of the year.

DERO CANADIAN LEGEND

In Argentina, pundits and professionals alike refer to new star footballers as "the next Maradona" or "the next Messi." In Brazil, comparisons are made with the greats, like Pelé, Ronaldinho and Ronaldo. Around the world, new stars are paired with older icons as the cycle of soccer stardom churns on

In Canada, where the beautiful game is taking root fast, an iconic name of the old generation is calling it a day. Canada's greatest soccer talent, Dwayne De Rosario, has retired at 37 years old.

To call De Rosario a legend in Canadian soccer history wouldn't even do him justice.
De Rosario is Canadian soccer. He is the country's all-time top scorer, its leader, the man who paved the road to professional football success for those who followed after. He is also an MLS icon, a league all-star, MVP, MLS Cup winner, more times and with more sheer will to win than any in his class His list of accolades is long. Too long, even, to recount from heart; he did it all and won it all over the course of an 18-year career with the San Jose Earthquakes, the Houston Dynamo, Toronto FC, the New York Red Bulls and D.C.

Dwayne De Rosario was, is, and will forever remain Canada's king of soccer.







AROUND THE MLS

ROBBIE KEANE FOREVER

The LA Galaxy made a splash in signing Steven Gerrard but the reigning kings of MLS made sure to keep their strong team core together, signing captain Robbie Keane to a contract extension. Keane, 34, will now remain with the LA Galaxy, signing the extension in his fifth year with the club after joining David Beckham in Los Angeles in 2011.





NEMETH RISING

When Sporting Kansas City picked up Hungarian international striker Krisztian Nemeth, few knew who he was and even fewer knew what he was capable of. Competing alongside some of the biggest names in the league, though, Nemeth has emerged as an absolute standout, winning Player of the Month in May for an outstanding month of goals, hold up play and his signature move: a shoulder turn that gets him past defenders time and time again

THE RETURN OF JERMAIN

Booed out of the city of Toronto, his name spoken with disdain by the club's supporters. Jermain Defoe looked to have departed to Sunderland for good. But, the English forward returns to BMO Field this summer as Sunderland takes on Toronto FC in another midseason friendly! It's the grudge match of the year: Defoe vs. Altidore, each taking on their former clubs. It's a bloody big deal, folks!



CAPTAIN, STRIKER, **FATHER**

Seattle Sounders' forward and U.S. national team captain Clint Dempsey is loving life in Seattle as his team continues. dominating in the West. but there was some more good news as he and his wife, Bethany added another new member to their family. Dempsey welcomed his fourth child, Clayton Daniel, early in June.



There's a rumour going around that Major League Soccer is looking to add a fourth Designated Player spot for teams around the league to take advantage of. This fourth DP would be unique, for players in between the big earners and the league cap max, but league officials are denying such a rule change, for now!

BY THE NUMBERS \$130 million

That's the estimated cost for Orlando City SC's new soccer stadium, a project that has been delayed and reworked because of a problem the club is facing: originally, the plan was to build a 19,000-seat stadium, but that just wasn't enough seats for Orlando's supporters! Now, they're pushing for a 25,000-28,000 seat home.



"WE'RE SO USED TO SEEING THE LA **GALAXY, THE SEATTLE SOUNDERS, SPORTING KANSAS CITY OR THE** DLUMBUS CREW AT THE TOP OF THEIR TABLES THAT IT'S ALMOST ODD TO LOOK AT THE MLS STANDINGS AT THE END OF THE **SECOND MONTH OF ACTION!"**

EYE ON EXPANSION

Major League Soccer is expanding, as always, with Atlanta, Miami, Los Angeles 2 and Minnesota set to join the league in the next few years, but expansion won't stop there. As the race for the next franchise heats up, it looks like two contenders have emerged: Sacramento and St. Louis. Both cities could potentially earn a franchise eventually, as MLS pushes towards more teams in the years to come



BY THE NUMBERS

That's the highest payroll in Major League Soccer, and it belongs to, you guessed it, Toronto FC; with Michael Bradley, Jozy Altidore and Sebastian Giovinco, Toronto FC has the highest payroll in MLS; in second, the LA Galaxy's Keane/Gonzalez/Gerrard trio commands \$15.4m; in third, New York City FC (\$15m) with David Villa and Frank Lampard to thank for it, and in fourth, Orlando City (\$13.5) due, in part, to Kaká!

"WELL, HERE'S ONE FROM THE EVER-CHURNING TRANSFER RUMOUR MILL: **PARIS ST-GERMAINE'S SWEDISH FORWARD ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC HAS** SUPPOSEDLY APPLIED FOR A U.S. WORK VISA"

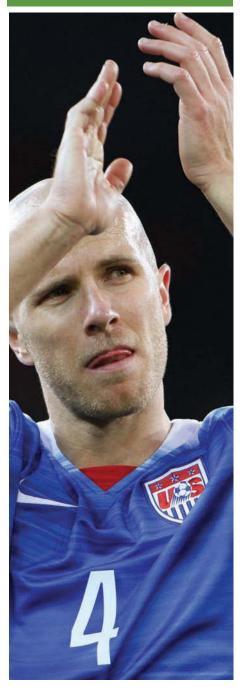


An average Major League Soccer team is worth US\$ 103 million, according to a Forbes article, published in the year 2013. When the Major League Soccer started average worth of the teams was US\$ 37 million and each team was making losses



THE NUMBERS

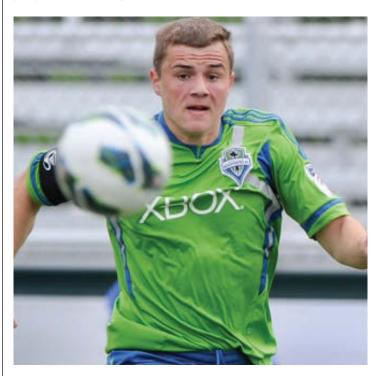
That's the number of players from Major League Soccer who have been called up for preliminary CONCACAF Gold Cup rosters as the region gets set to compete for the continental crown. Some notable names include Michael Bradley (U.S.), Blas Perez (Panama), Cyle Larin (Canada) and Alvaro Saborio (Costa Rica).



the benchmark in the east and the west respectively, undefeated home streaks for D.C. United and the LA Galaxy, both of which came crashing down by Canadian hands. Toronto FC snapped D.C. United's 20-game lossless run with a Giovinco-inspired win and the Vancouver Whitecaps tore through the LA Galaxy's 23-game unbeaten streak with a 1-0 win of their own.

A NEW STAR EMERGES

There's a new soccer phenom brewing over at Stamford University, as future Seattle Sounders forward Jordan Morris has begun his rise to the top of soccer in North America. The 20-year-old striker out of the Seattle Sounders' Academy has already been called up for, and has scored goals with the U.S. national team and is considered one of the top young prospects in MLS today.





COMING TO AMERICA

Juventus midfielder and Italian national team legend Andrea Pirlo has just wrapped up another big year with the Turin club, winning Serie A and making it to the Champions League Final; it looks like the 36-year-old may be joining New York City FC, following in the footsteps of Alessandro Nesta, Marco Di Vaio and Sebastian Giovinco.



GOLD NO MORE

The Columbus Crew is iconic in Major League Soccer for its bright yellow kits, but according to a report by massivereport.com, those vellow shirts will bow out at the end of the season in favour of a black shirt with yellow trim. It's a big change for the Crew, a team that underwent a brand transformation for this season, but fans are not pleased with this most recent change.

"HE'S SO QUICK THAT YOU THINK YOU WANT TO GET TIGHT TO HIM BUT IF YOU GET TIGHT TO HIM, HE SPINS YOU. YOU GET TIGHT TO HIM AND HE'S ALSO STRONG ON THE BALL AND WINS HIS SPACE WELL. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF THINGS THAT HE DOES THAT MAKES IT VERY DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO DEAL WITH HIM. AND REALLY, EVEN COLLECTIVE GROUPS TO DEAL WITH HIM," - TFC head coach Greg Vanney on Sebastian Giovinco.



THE ROAD BECKHAM PAVED

As the July window opens and the Premier League season is all wrapped up, two English legends make their way across the pond on the road paved by David Beckham; Frank Lampard joins New York City FC and Steven Gerrard head to the LA Galaxy. These two English midfielders joined their respective clubs earlier but had to wait until the summer window to make the move official. Now, it's a battle of the east vs. the west for England's two finest midfielders.



A NEW HOME AT LAST

D.C. District Mayor Muriel E. Bowser and D.C. United's owners have finalized a stadium development deal at long, long last! The deal will keep the team in D.C. as long as the government finds land for a stadium by September 30. It's full steam ahead for a soccer specific stadium for D.C. United, a dream the club has had for the better part of the last decade!

BY THE NUMBERS 6 and 12

It took Toronto FC ace Sebastian Giovinco 12 games to match the team's all-time assist record at six, and score seven goals of his own, too. Giovinco has been on fire this season, and he ranks fourth best among the top debuts in league history.

TROUBLE WITH TAMPERING

Orlando City SC head coach Adrian Heath is walking on precarious ground after making his intentions to sign Sporting Kansas City forward Dom Dwyer public on the radio. Dwyer spent a season with Orlando during the team's time in the NASL and is now one of the top forwards in MLS. It's no secret Orlando wants him, but saying so publically might just get Heath in some trouble down the line with the rulebook.



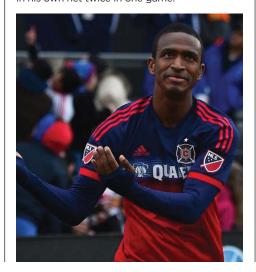


TURNAROUND IN MONTREAL

The Montreal Impact is finally, finally clicking. There has never been much doubt that the pieces in Montreal's roster are of adequate quality and it looks like a successful run to the finals of the CONCACAF Champions League has instilled some belief and confidence in Montreal at long last. The team is rushing up the table after picking up multiple wins and looks a dangerous side, despite dealing with a tremendous number of injuries along the way. Watch out for Montreal, folks!

PROUD OF HIS OWN

Chicago Fire defender Adailton is the proud holder of a new record in Major League Soccer. In a match against Orlando City, Adailton made MLS history with a pair of goals, one in each half. The problem? They were own goals, making Adailton the first player in MLS to score in his own net twice in one game!



DID YOU KNOW?

Jordan Morris isn't just a star on the rise, but a rather curious character as well; he always has a bag of Skittles handy off to the sidelines because Morris has type 1 diabetes. He's also the son of the Seattle Sounders' medical director and has the honour of being the first college soccer player to play for the U.S. national team.

"THE PROBLEM IS I THINK WITH PEOPLE IN EUROPE AND THIS WON'T BE STEVIE'S CASE BECAUSE I'VE ALREADY TOLD **HIM HOW DIFFICULT THE LEAGUE IS HERE – IS THAT PEOPLE THINK THEY'RE COMING OVER HERE TO FINISH THEIR CAREER** AND IT'S A HOLIDAY, BUT WHEN YOU PLAY FOR THE GALAXY, THAT'S **NOT THE CASE. YOU'RE COMING OVER HERE TO WIN THINGS. BECAUSE** THAT'S WHAT IS EXPECTED **BECAUSE WE'RE ONE OF** THE BIGGEST TEAMS IN THE MLS AND WE HAVE STANDARDS HERE," - LA

Galaxy captain Robbie Keane on his new teammate, Steven Gerrard.



BY THE NUMBERS

San Jose Earthquakes forward Chris Wondolowski joined esteemed company over the last month, scoring his 100th career MLS goal against Orlando from the penalty spot. Wondolowski now joins the century club alongside other MLS greats like Landon Donovan, Dwayne De Rosario and Jeff Cunningham.







NEW WRAP COLLECTION

SellsGoalKeeperCanada.com
#arotherlevel







TACTIC

THE WINNING **DECISIONS FROM** THE COACHES **WHO LED THEIR** TEAMS TO CHAMPIONSHIP SUCCESS IN EUROPE'S TOP FOUR LEAGUES

Chelsea's 2014-15 Premier League title success won't go down as Jose Mourinho's greatest tactical master class. He's had to work harder than that in the past to get his hands on notable silverware, but it's not as if the Portuguese tactician doesn't deserve a good chunk of recognition for what his side achieved domestically over the last 12 months. Diego Costa provided Mourinho with the kind of prolific striker he so desperately wanted, while Cesc Fabregas was brought in as the new playmaker. On paper, it looked as if it was the same 4-2-3-1 system which Mou had used in the past - but it wasn't. Instead of using two ball-winning defensive midfielders in front of the defence. Mourinho fielded the forwardthinking Fabregas alongside holding midfielder Nemanja Matic. It worked wonders. Chelsea were top of the League from start to finish and their positive start to the campaign – a Mourinho trademark – meant they were able to control the outcome of the title race with some ease. Jose did very little tweaking to his side too, the defence remained virtually unchanged, while he was also able to bring the very best out of Eden Hazard.

IN GERMANY...

Bayern Munich were only expected to face competition from Borussia Dortmund for the title in 2014-15, but after the latter's disastrous opening to the campaign, it was pretty obvious that Bayern would have it all their own way. Their unbeaten first half of the season confirmed as much given that, after 17 games, they had an 11-point lead and had conceded just four goals.

Summer signing Xabi Alonso proved to be a revelation, while Manuel Neuer continued to confirm himself as one of the best goalkeepers in the world. Arjen Robben, David Alaba and new boy Robert Lewandowski all impressed too. However, it wasn't a season without problems for boss Pep Guardiola. Bayern suffered numerous injuries, especially towards the business end of the season, and wrapping up the title at home so soon arguably had an effect in the Champions League semifinal loss to Barcelona. Guardiola's decision to play with a three-man defence against his

former club has been questioned. There is no doubt that the Spaniard is a fine tactician, but there will always be question marks unless he can guide Bayern to European Cup success.

IN SPAIN

Not everyone was convinced Luis Enrique was the right choice to be the new Barcelona boss last summer. Sure he was a former player who was regarded highly within the walls of the Nou Camp, but his managerial record up until that point was not exactly outstanding. A year later - having survived a tough Winter - and he had led Barca to the treble of La Liga, the Cup and the Champions League.

How did they do it? This was a different Barcelona side to the one of Pep Guardiola While the latter demanded possession football, Luis Enrique was happy for his side to have less of the ball so long as they were effective when they did get it back

With a front three of Neymar, Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez, it often suited Barcelona to play on the counter attack. Messi was moved from a central starting position to one on the right and, as usual, he was immense. By the time the campaign had come to an end, the Three Amigos had amassed more than 120 goals between them. Wow!

After three straight Serie A titles, Juventus started pre-season training as favourites to once more end the campaign at the top of the table. Twenty four hours later and there were some doubts after boss Antonio Conte sensationally decided to quit. His replacement, Massimiliano Allegri, wasn't exactly welcomed with open arms by sceptical fans.

FORMATIONS OF THE PAST

needed to change. His idea was to employ 4-2-4 tactics, giving his outfield players more freedom to improvise. The general idea was to defend as six and attack as six – with the two central midfielders given the task of going from one to the other. The Selecao lifted the 1958 and 1970 World Cups by playing in such an elastic manner.

Allegri, though, rebuilt his reputation and with some style. Although he initially kept faith with Conte's 3-5-2 system, this was a new Juve who played with more patience and more freedom. And, as the squad got to grips with his methods, he gradually introduced the 4-3-1-2 formation which he had so often used in the past.

Although Juve didn't amass the same kind of points which they achieved a year earlier, they comfortably won another Scudetto, lifted the Coppa Italia and reached the Final of the Champions League. The players obviously did the work on the field of play, but don't underestimate what Allegri has achieved this season.

Hi José, I've heard you're You're joking I'm not that interested in the



"HE'S HAD TO WORK HARDER THAN THAT **IN THE PAST** TO GET HIS HANDS ON NOTABLE **SILVER** WARE."



COACH'S CORNER PRACTICE MAKES

SETTING UP THEIR TEAMS...

Counter punch

"Some people say they play with an idea, a philosophy that their teams keep the ball and build from the back, without playing counterattacking football. But if you don't play counter-attack then it's because you are stupid. Counter-attack is a fantastic item of football, an ammunition that you have, and when you find your opponent unbalanced you have a fantastic moment to score a goal." Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho



Getting the Max

"It is impossible in football these days to think you can invent something new tactically. You just can't anymore because the game is played at such a pace. The only difference you can make is how you look after your squad of players. You can't treat everyone with the same method because every player needs to be assessed on an individual basis. They need to be studied and then you need to decide how you will get the best out of them."

Juventus Coach Massimiliano Allegri

Copying Ajax

"In the 1990s I was in charge of the Juventus vouth side. We played with a 4-3-3, while at the time 90 per cent of sides in Italy played with a 4-4-2 because of Arrigo Sacchi. Meanwhile, I used to watch Ajax in Europe whose players danced in a 3-4-3. After watching the way they played, I too decided to play with three at the back." Genoa boss Gian Piero Gasperini



True or False?

'The idea behind playing with a False Nine with no recognised striker - is that it doesn't give our opponents any reference points in attack. When you have the midfield players available to you then it is a system that you should consider using. When you have such richness in your play then it can work well for you."

Spain boss Vicente Del **Bosaue**

Old school 4-4-2

"The main strength of the 4-4-2 is the back four. It gives you the best possibility of defending the width of the pitch. If one defender moves out of position, there are still three there who can shift across. That doesn't happen when you play with just three at the back. The 4-4-2 is all about playing in pairs - the full-back and the winger, the two centre-backs, the two central midfielders and the two forwards." **England boss Roy Hodgson**



HOW TO TRAIN AND PLAY **LIKE A PROFESSIONAL**

'There are times when you have to adapt your natural game to help the team. As an attacking player, playing for a top team, I have learned that I have to support the defence and not just the attack." Eden Hazard of Chelsea and **Belaium**

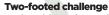
First impressions

"It's always good to start the game positively. You have to choose the right time to run at defenders, but if you can get an early run at them that lets them know what they're in for, do it. If the defender gets the better of you first time out, don't dwell on it - just keep trusting your ability. Confidence is half the battle. Press the defender when they have the ball. Force them into mistakes and knock their confidence. You want to get them worrying about you."



Real Madrid and Wales ace

"The most important quality you need to play off a striker is vision. Being able to see everything is vital. As soon as you receive the ball, you must immediately look around for your forward or wide midfielder. One of the best ways to develop this vision is by practising rondos. This piggy-in-themiddle game gets you working in tight spaces and improves your touch. With one or two people in front of you, you must know your surroundings before you even get the ball." Spain and Atletico Madrid midfielder Koke



"Being able to shoot with both feet is such an important weapon for a striker to have. Being able to surprise them is crucial. I like to mix up what side I go when I come up against a defender in a one-against-one situation. Part of the skill is mental. Convince yourself that you can play with both feet and, with practice. vou can improve. In every session, train yourself to take touches and play passes with either foot and then you'll build up confidence to shooting that way too." Manchester United and Colombia ace Radamel Falcao

Control, think and pass

"The first touch is the single most important thing in football - especially for the type of player I am. Controlling the ball with your first touch and thinking about how to make the next move will make a difference to your game. The game moves so quickly, you need those extra seconds to do something special. Defenders are now as quick as midfielders or strikers, so quick decision-making and a good first touch can make the difference between winning or losing." Mario Gotze of Bayern Munich and Germany



FOOTBALLER...



WINGBACK

What do you get

a winger? The wing-back of

course. Usually

deployed in a

3-5-2 system, they can also be

used in a 4-3-3

most physically

positions in the

modern-game,

they are expect-ed to defend

and attack with

equal amounts

of gusto - as well

as to supply top

demanding





NSTORE

Whether you're training on the pitch, or supporting vour favourite teams. Soccer 360 breaks down some unique, new products to spike your interest.

ADIDAS MESSI15

Inspired by the genius of Lionel Messi, these latest cleats are not to be missed! This silver and blue shoe looks as alien as Messi's playing style. They look impressive enough to have you be the difference on the field.



ADIDAS CONEXT15 BALL

The newest adidas ball, the Conext15. is the official match ball of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup It features a revolutionary new panel design and features a red, green, blue and black art design.



ADIDAS FINALE BERLIN OFFICIAL

MATCH BALL

This Champions League final official match ball by adidas commemorates vet another memorable **UEFA** Champions League. The signature star-shaped panels and a special CL Finals logo make this ball a collectable item worth having.

ADIDAS MESSI15

Inspired by the genius of Lionel Messi, these latest cleats are not to be missed! This silver and blue shoe looks as alien as Messi's playing style. They look impressive enough to have you be the difference on the field.



ADIDAS PIBE DE BARR10 CLEATS

Well, if this isn't the most artistic cleat on the market today, we don't know what is! Puma's latest evoSPEED shoe features a green dragon wrapped around that oh so famous Puma swipe (red). Make a statement with every step.



PANINI FIFA 2015 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP STICKER BOOK

The addiction is real and it is unshakeable. Panini's latest World Cup sticker book features all 24 national teams competing in the tournament. Your mission? Complete every page!



BARCELONA 2015/16 KIT

It's around this time of the year that next season's kits are slowly revealed. F.C. Barcelona has already shown off its new shirt and boy, is it a game changer. Barcelona's iconic vertical stripes have been replaced with horizontal



NIKE NEYMAR/CR7 BACKPACKS

It's never too early to start some back to school shopping, and Nike has released new specially branded Neymar and Cristiano Ronaldo backpacks just in time for the summer break.





FOOTY STARS

Sunglasses were the order of the day at the Women's World Cup as it wasn't just the stars who shone. While fans may have been dazzled by the skills on display they were certainly blinded by the brightly coloured footwear: Vivid yellow, hot pink, lime green, intense orange, sky blue and more and that's not including the multi-coloured creations. Including the one hot pink, one turquoise Puma Tricks.

Selecting footwear is obviously a very personal matter, relating as it does to fit, comfort and performance. Players are therefore allowed to make

their own individual choices with sponsorship also playing its part. There was surprise however that some players of Canada's Umbro sponsored team were wearing competing brands of footwear. Christine Sinclair, Sophie Schmidt, Adrianna Leon and Desiree Scott, for example, all sported Nike cleats

Even more of the US team opted for Nike with Carli Lloyd, Abby Wambach, Whitney Engen and Julie Johnston all choosing the famous swoosh, likely reflecting the fact that Nike also sponsors the team uniforms.

Nike has made women-specific boots in the past, but this year was the first time they brought a significant degree of innovation into the women's game. They sized down and also introduced their first integrated soccer

cleat collection specifically for female players. Many models include an ankle guard for extra comfort and a little ankle protection.

Nike's website focuses almost exclusively on the range and intensity of colours available rather than any technical attributes. However performance is a factor in the design and the different models are supposedly designed to meet the needs of different types of player. The Mercurial, worn by Sinclair and Wambach, offers a close fit and includes a stud design and a flexible carbon-fibre plate to provide freedom, all in the interest of maximizing speed. The Magista, aimed at playmakers like Schmidt, allows midfielders to swivel quickly with conical shaped hollow studs and uses materials that enhance ball touch. The Tiempo (worn, for example, by Shannon Boxx) is all about assisting touch and control. If you ask amateur players, colour and brand endorsements appear to be

indeed, change or add new colours every few months or so to keep the collection 'cool', in vogue and in demand.

Jan Lang, manager at Metrosport - The Soccer Store concurs: "The enhancements may mean something at the elite level but teens buy with the eye - fashion and fashionable are key. Many buy because the boots are associated with name players - who is wearing it? Interestingly, they aspire to the male players rather than the women."

Soccer coach John de Benedictis believes the bright colours may be making a difference on the field. In his book The Last 9 Seconds (a treatise on goalscoring) he wonders whether the highly visible boots helps defenders by allowing them to react fractionally quicker in blocking and tackling. He points out that these boots first came to prominence in the 2011 Women's World Cup and the total number of goals scored was far lower than usual - a paltry 2.7 per match, 25% less then the 3.6 average of

all previous tournaments.

One thing is certain, today's boots are far lighter, far more comfortable, far more flexible than both the original boot which was likely to be a regular Iking boot with leather bars nailed to the sole, and, beginning in the 1880s, its custom made successors. Even back then they were marketed

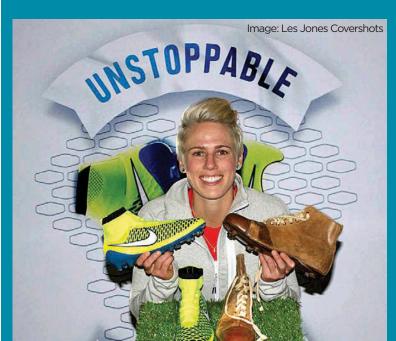
with player testimonials.

Made of thick, heavy-duty leather, the early boots were expected to protect the feet and ankles and to last forever. Much shooting and passing

In 1891, regulations came into effect standardizing the leather bars or studs on boots to prevent dangerous DIY combinations being applied and 1900 referees were authorized to check players' boots for safety - a practice still in effect.

Incredibly, in Europe and North America, it was not until the 1950s that that basic boot design changed. On a South American tour by England, the players noticed the sleeker, lighter, more malleable boots used by their opponents. Super-star Stanley Matthews brought the idea home and the footwear revolution was on. The early boots felt and weighed like lead, around 550gm each. Nike's latest are less than half that, just 205gm.

eyes from their glare. This was fortunate, as sunglasses, as we know them, hadn't been invented!



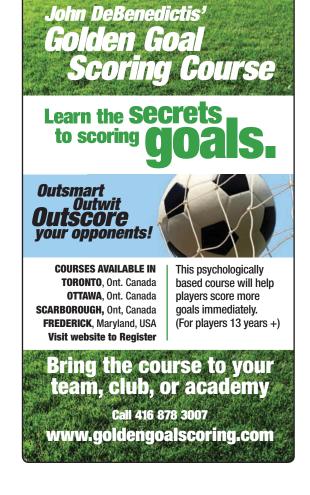




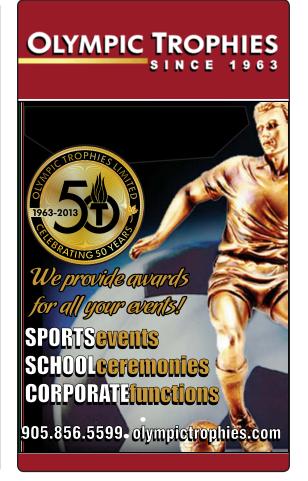












FIFA NEEDS REFORM

AND RESPECT AND ENFRANCHISEMENT AND A MANDATE FOR MEANINGFUL WORK

Jerrad Peters

"If a man does not know to what port he is steering, no wind is favourable to him." These words of Seneca were penned during the latter days of the stoic's retirement on the outskirts of Rome.

Having withdrawn from public life (and given that he spent nearly a decade tutoring the emperor Nero—whom early Preterists held to be the Antichrist-it was quite the life) he imparted what wisdom he had gained in a series of letters addressed to the procurator of Sicily, among which was embedded this quote. Laced with age and experience, it speaks to the value of an objective. And, between the lines, it warns of a vessel drifting aimlessly, rocked by waves to the side of the frame. FIFA would do well to adopt Seneca's hindsight, perhaps altering it into a sort of advanced retrospection to suit it purposes. With long-time president Sepp Blatter having announced his intention to resign, world football's governing body has a unique, perhaps unprecedented, opportunity to reset its course, to choose its port of call, Getting there will no doubt require the sagacity and clairvoyance of an as-yet-unknown captain, but even before he or she is installed at an Extraordinary Council, likely to be convened in early 2016, the organization can at least deliberate on the direction it wants to go. And it can do so by posing a single, all-encompassing question: "What do we want FIFA to be?" Because it's only after undergoing such an existential inquiry that the bearings are determined.

"IF A MAN
DOES NOT
KNOW
TO WHAT
PORT HE IS
STEERING,
NO WIND IS
FAVOURABLE
TO HIM."







Incidentally, many different people have wanted FIFA to be many different things throughout its 111-year history.
Initially comprised of seven European associations with an eye towards broader organization of the sport at international level, it was largely disregarded by the Home Nations, which had little interest in relinquishing their grip on a game they felt was best consolidated in themselves.
To them, at the time, FIFA didn't seem the sort of body they could manipulate.
But as the fledgling institution grew in numbers

But as the fledgling institution grew in numbers and influence, the British, after the Second World War, brought themselves into the fold. The post-war years saw FIFA run as a mostly Eurocentric society. Twelve of the 16 teams at the 1954 World Cup were European; South America was allocated just a pair of berths. Africa had none.

As it happened, Sir Stanley Rous, president of FIFA between 1961 and 1974, tried for a time to include South Africa in the quadrennial tournament. But as Rous was an apartheid supporter, even this attempt was tinged with racism.

For its administrators from 1946 to 1974, FIFA was a remnant of imperialism. Which is why the election of Joao Havelange was greeted with such enthusiasm throughout the Americas and in Asia, Africa and Oceania—anywhere, really, that was ready to peel away the European tentacles.

The 1982 World Cup—the first under Havelange's watch—was grown to 24 teams, of which only 14 hailed from Europe. At the 1998 event—the Brazilian's last—there were four Asian participants, five African and eight from the Americas among the 32, which represented yet another expansion.

As we know, Havelange's big-business approach to international football and its organizational setup invited no shortage of corruption allegations, but given their enfranchisement it was an oversight the non-European confederations were willing to make. And they continued with the trade-off under Blatter, his successor.

As former Zambia international and current president of that country's football association remarked after the 79-year-old's resignation

announcement, "Sepp did very well for Africa, and whoever succeeds him should look to do the same.

Added Ghana's FA chief Kwesi Nyantakyi: "It's very irritating for someone to ask me why I voted for Blatter. Why shouldn't I? We take decisions on the situation on the ground by looking at the pros and cons...and whether it benefits us."

For the non-European bloc, FIFA represents a route to inclusion, and their support of Blatter reads rather differently among that constituency than in the Global North-West, where reform schemes such as privatizing the World Cup and ending the one-confederation, one-vote election system are now being discussed.

"None of these solutions have much to do with the meat of the FBI's findings," wrote Elliot Ross in a June 3 editorial for Al Jazeera. "Instead, these so-called solutions favour an old-fashioned power grab, and such responses will permanently impoverish the world's game if they succeed."

As Ross went on to explain, the ideal of a global football body involves positive, social construction that accomplishes a universality of enfranchisement across languages, genders, races and socioeconomic barriers.

The idea of FIFA, if this is its raison d'etre, is a good one, an important one, and a complete destruction and reconstruction of the organization would inevitably leave many of the same problems it's currently experiencing. No doubt a handful of powerful people involved in football governance must be removed from those places of power over the next few months, and Blatter, should he be guilty of criminal behaviour, might even be among them.

But where does FIFA go from there? Hopefully, if it embraces the thinking of the stoic, it will first determine the objective before charting the course.

There is something for FIFA in Seneca's wisdom, but unheeded the winds will be unfavourable, the organization shipwrecked or, at the very least, sent back to a time when it served so very few.

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